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MEN, WOMEN AND GUNS

"SAPPER"

MEN, WOMEN AND GUNS

BY

"SAPPER"

AUTHOR OF

MICHAEL CASSIDY, SERGEANT

NEW YORK
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TO
MY WIFE

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PROLOGUE

PROLOGUE

TWO days ago a dear old aunt of mine asked me to describe to her what shrapnel was like.

"What does it feel like to be shelled?" she demanded. "Explain it to me."

Under the influence of my deceased uncle's most excellent port I did so. Soothed and in that expansive frame of mind induced by the old and bold, I drew her a picture—vivid, startling, wonderful. And when I had finished, the dear old lady looked at me.

"Dreadful!" she murmured. "Did I ever tell you of the terrible experience I had on the front at Eastbourne, when my bath-chair attendant became inebriated and upset me?"

Slowly and sorrowfully I finished the decanter—and went to bed.

But seriously, my masters, it is a hard thing that my aunt asked of me. There are many things worse than shelling—the tea-party you find in progress on your arrival on leave; the utterances of war experts; the non-arrival of the whisky from England. But all of those can be imagined by people who have not suf-

fered; they have a standard, a measure of comparison. Shelling—no.

The explosion of a howitzer shell near you is a definite, actual fact—which is unlike any other fact in the world, except the explosion of another howitzer shell still nearer. Many have attempted to describe the noise it makes as the most explainable part about it. And then you're no wiser.

Listen. Stand with me at the Menin Gate of Ypres and listen. Through a cutting a train is roaring on its way. Rapidly it rises in a great swelling crescendo as it dashes into the open, and then its journey stops on some giant battlement—stops in a peal of deafening thunder just overhead. The shell has burst, and the echoes in that town of death die slowly away—reverberating like a sullen sea that lashes against a rock-bound coast.

And yet what does it convey to anyone who patronises inebriated bath-chair men? . . .

Similarly—shrapnel! "The Germans were searching the road with 'whizz-bangs.'" A common remark, an ordinary utterance in a letter, taken by fond parents as an unpleasing affair such as the cook giving notice.

Come with me to a spot near Ypres; come, and we will take our evening walk together.

"They're a bit lively farther up the road, sir." The corporal of military police stands gloomily at a cross-

roads, his back against a small wayside shrine. A passing shell unroofed it many weeks ago; it stands there surrounded by débris—the image of the Virgin, chipped and broken. Just a little monument of desolation in a ruined country, but pleasant to lean against when it's between you and German guns.

Let us go on, it's some way yet before we reach the dug-out by the third dead horse. In front of us stretches a long, straight road, flanked on each side by poplars. In the middle there is pavé. At intervals, a few small holes, where the stones have been shattered and hurled away by a bursting shell and only the muddy grit remains hollowed out to a depth of two feet or so, half-full of water. At the bottom an empty tin of bully, ammunition clips, numbers of biscuits—sodden and muddy. Altogether a good obstacle to take with the front wheel of a car at night.

A little farther on, beside the road, in a ruined, desolate cottage two men are resting for a while, smoking. The dirt and mud of the trenches is thick on them, and one of them is contemplatively scraping his boot with his knife and fork. Otherwise, not a soul, not a living soul in sight; though away to the left front, through glasses, you can see two people, a man and a woman, labouring in the fields. And the only point of interest about them is that between you and them run the two motionless, stagnant lines of men who for months have

faced one another. Those two labourers are on the other side of the German trenches.

The setting sun is glinting on the little crumbling village two or three hundred yards ahead, and as you walk towards it in the still evening air your steps ring loud on the pavé. On each side the flat, neglected fields stretch away from the road; the drains beside it are choked with weeds and refuse; and here and there one of the gaunt trees, split in two half-way up by a shell, has crashed into its neighbour or fallen to the ground. A peaceful summer's evening which seems to give the lie to our shrine-leaner. And yet, to one used to the peace of England, it seems almost too quiet, almost unnatural.

Suddenly, out of the blue there comes a sharp, whizzing noise, and almost before you've heard it there is a crash, and from the village in front there rises a cloud of dust. A shell has burst on impact on one of the few remaining houses; some slates and tiles fall into the road, and round the hole torn out of the sloping roof there hangs a whitish-yellow cloud of smoke. In quick succession come half a dozen more, some bursting on the ruined cottages as they strike, some bursting above them in the air. More clouds of dust rise from the deserted street, small avalanches of débris cascade into the road, and, above, three or four thick white smoke-clouds drift slowly across the sky.

This is the moment at which it is well—unless time is urgent—to pause and reflect awhile. If you *must* go on, a détour is strongly to be recommended. The Germans are shelling the empty village just in front with shrapnel, and who are you to interpose yourself between him and his chosen target? But if in no particular hurry, then it were wise to dally gracefully against a tree, admiring the setting sun, until he desists; when you may in safety resume your walk. *But*—do not forget that he may not stick to the village, and that whizz-bangs give no time. That is why I specified a tree, and not the middle of the road. It's nearer the ditch.

Suddenly, without a second's warning, they shift their target. Whizz-bang! Duck, you blighter! Into the ditch. Quick! Move! Hang your bottle of white wine! Get down! Cower! Emulate the mole! This isn't the village in front now—he's shelling the road you're standing on! There's one burst on impact in the middle of the pavé forty yards in front of you, and another in the air just over your head. And there are more coming—don't make any mistake. That short, sharp whizz every few seconds—the bang! bang! bang! seems to be going on all around you. A thing hums past up in the air, with a whistling noise, leaving a trail of sparks behind it—one of the fuses. Later, the

curio-hunter may find it nestling by a turnip. He may have it.

With a vicious thud a jagged piece of shell buries itself in the ground at your feet; and almost simultaneously the bullets from a well-burst one cut through the trees above you and ping against the road, thudding into the earth around. No more impact ones—they've got the range. Our pessimistic friend at the cross-roads spoke the truth; they're quite lively. Everything bursting beautifully above the road about forty feet up. Bitter thought—if only the blighters knew that it was empty save for your wretched and unworthy self cowering in a ditch, with a bottle of white wine in your pocket and your head down a rat-hole, surely they wouldn't waste their ammunition so reprehensibly!

Then, suddenly, they stop, and as the last white puff of smoke drifts slowly away you cautiously lift your head and peer towards the village. Have they finished? Will it be safe to resume your interrupted promenade in a dignified manner? Or will you give them another minute or two? Almost have you decided to do so when to your horror you perceive coming towards you through the village itself two officers. What a position to be discovered in! True, only the very young or the mentally deficient scorn cover when shelling is in progress. But of course, just at the moment when you'd welcome a shell to account for

your propinquity with the rat-hole, the blighters have stopped. No sound breaks the stillness, save the steps ringing towards you—and it looks silly to be found in a ditch for no apparent reason.

Then, as suddenly as before comes salvation. Just as with infinite stealth you endeavour to step out nonchalantly from behind a tree, as if you were part of the scenery—bang! crash! from in front. Cheer-oh! the village again, the church this time. A shower of bricks and mortar comes down like a landslip, and if you are quick you may just see two black streaks go to ground. From the vantage-point of your tree you watch a salvo of shells explode in, on, or about the temporary abode of those two officers. You realise from what you know of the Hun that this salvo probably concludes the evening hate; and the opportunity is too good to miss. Edging rapidly along the road—keeping close to the ditch—you approach the houses. Your position, you feel, is now strategically sound, with regard to the wretched pair cowering behind rubble heaps. You even desire revenge for your mental anguish when discovery in the rodent's lair seemed certain. So light a cigarette—if you didn't drop them all when you went to ground yourself; if you did—whistle some snappy tune as you stride jauntily into the village.

Don't go too fast or you may miss them; but should

you see a head peer from behind a kitchen-range express no surprise. Just—"Toppin' evening, ain't it? Getting furniture for the dug-out—what?" To linger is bad form, but it is quite permissible to ask his companion—seated in a torn-up drain—if the ratting is good. Then pass on in a leisurely manner, *but*—when you're round the corner, run like a hare. With these cursed Germans, you never know.

Night—and a working-party stretching away over a ploughed field are digging a communication trench. The great green flares lob up half a mile away, a watery moon shines on the bleak scene. Suddenly a noise like the tired sigh of some great giant, a scorching sheet of flame that leaps at you out of the darkness, searing your very brain, so close does it seem; the ping of death past your head; the clatter of shovel and pick next you as a muttered curse proclaims a man is hit; a voice from down the line: "Gawd! Old Ginger's took it. 'Old up, mate. Say, blokes, Ginger's done in!" Aye—it's worse at night.

Shrapnel! Woolly, fleecy puffs of smoke floating gently down wind, getting more and more attenuated, gradually disappearing, while below each puff an oval of ground has been plastered with bullets. And it's when the ground inside the oval is full of men that the damage is done.

Not you perhaps—but someone. Next time—maybe you.

And that, methinks, is an epitome of other things besides shrapnel. It's *all* the war to the men who fight and the women who wait.

PART ONE

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

THE MOTOR-GUN

NOTHING in this war has so struck those who have fought in it as its impersonal nature. From the day the British Army moved north, and the first battle of Ypres commenced—and with it trench warfare as we know it now—it has been, save for a few interludes, a contest between automatons, backed by every known scientific device. Personal rancour against the opposing automatons separated by twenty or thirty yards of smelling mud—who stew in the same discomfort as yourself—is apt to give way to an acute animosity against life in general, and the accursed fate in particular which so foolishly decided your sex at birth. But, though rare, there have been cases of isolated encounters, where men—with the blood running hot in their veins—have got down to

hand-grips, and grappling backwards and forwards in some cellar or dugout, have fought to the death, man to man, as of old. Such a case has recently come to my knowledge, a case at once bizarre and unique: a case where the much-exercised arm of coincidence showed its muscles to a remarkable degree. Only quite lately have I found out all the facts, and now at Dick O'Rourke's special request I am putting them on paper. True, they are intended to reach the eyes of one particular person, but . . . the personal column in the *Times* interests others besides the lady in the magenta skirt, who will eat a banana at 3.30 daily by the Marble Arch!

And now, at the very outset of my labours, I find myself—to my great alarm—committed to the placing on paper of a love scene. O'Rourke insists upon it: he says the whole thing will fall flat if I don't put it in; he promises that he will supply the local colour. In advance I apologise: my own love affairs are sufficiently trying without endeavouring to describe his—and with that, here goes.

I will lift my curtain on the principals of this little drama, and open the scene at Ciro's in London. On the evening of April 21st, 1915, in the corner of that delectable resort, farthest away from the coon band, sat Dickie O'Rourke. That afternoon he had stepped

from the boat at Folkestone on seven days' leave, and now in the boiled shirt of respectability he once again smelled the smell of London.

With him was a girl. I have never seen her, but from his description I cannot think that I have lived until this oversight is rectified. Moreover, my lady, as this is written especially for your benefit, I hereby warn you that I propose to remedy my omission as soon as possible.

And yet with a band that is second to none; with food wonderful and divine; with the choicest fruit of the grape, and—to top all—with the girl, Dickie did not seem happy. As he says, it was not to be wondered at. He had landed at Folkestone meaning to propose; he had carried out his intention over the fish—and after that the dinner had lost its savour. She had refused him—definitely and finally; and Dick found himself wishing for France again—France and forgetfulness. Only he knew he'd never forget.

"The dinner is to monsieur's taste?" The head-waiter paused attentively by the table.

"Very good," growled Dick, looking savagely at an ice on his plate. "Oh, Moyra," he muttered, as the man passed on, "it's meself is finished entoirely. And I was feeling that happy on the boat; as I saw the white cliffs coming nearer and nearer, I said to meself, 'Dick, me boy, in just four hours you'll be

with the dearest, sweetest girl that God ever sent from the heavens to brighten the lives of dull dogs like yourself.' "

"You're not dull, Dick. You're not to say those things—you're a dear." The girl's eyes seemed a bit misty as she bent over her plate.

"And now!" He looked at her pleadingly. "'Tis the light has gone out of my life. Ah! me dear, is there no hope for Dickie O'Rourke? Me estate is mostly bog, and the ould place has fallen down, saving only the stable—but there's the breath of the seas that comes over the heather in the morning, and there's the violet of your dear eyes in the hills. It's not worrying you that I'd be—but is there no hope at all, at all?"

The girl turned towards him, smiling a trifle sadly. There was woman's pity in the lovely eyes: her lips were trembling a little. "Dear old Dick," she whispered, and her hand rested lightly on his for a moment. "Dear old Dick, I'm sorry. If I'd only known sooner——" She broke off abruptly and fell to gazing at the floor.

"Then there is someone else!" The man spoke almost fiercely.

Slowly she nodded her head, but she did not speak.

"Who is it?"

"I don't know that you've got any right to ask me that, Dick," she answered, a little proudly.

"What's the talk of right between you and me? Do you suppose I'll let any cursed social conventions stand between me and the woman I love?" She could see his hand trembling, though outwardly he seemed quite calm. And then his voice dropped to a tender, pleading note—and again the soft, rich brogue of the Irishman crept in—that wonderful tone that brings with it the music of the fairies from the hazy blue hills of Connemara.

"Acushla mine," he whispered, "would I be hurting a hair of your swate head, or bringing a tear to them violet pools ye calls your eyes? 'Tis meself that is in the wrong entoirely—but, mavourneen, I just worship you. And the thought of the other fellow is driving me crazy. Will ye not be telling me his name?"

"Dick, I can't," she whispered, piteously. "You wouldn't understand."

"And why would I not understand?" he answered, grimly. "Is it something shady he has done to you?—for if it is, by the Holy Mother, I'll murder him."

"No, no, it's nothing shady. But I can't tell you, Dick; and oh, Dick! I'm just wretched, and I don't know what to do." The tears were very near.

A whimsical look came into his face as he watched her. "Moyra, me dear; 'tis about ten shillings apiece we're paying for them ices; and if you splash them with your darling tears, the chef will give notice and that coon with the banjo will strike work."

"You dear, Dick," she whispered, after a moment, while a smile trembled round her mouth. "I nearly made a fool of myself."

"Divil a bit," he answered. "But let us be after discussing them two fair things yonder while we gets on with the ices. 'Tis the most suitable course for contemplating the dears; and, anyway, we'll take no more risks until we're through with them."

And so with a smile on his lips and a jest on his tongue did a gallant gentleman cover the ache in his heart and the pain in his eyes, and felt more than rewarded by the look of thanks he got. It was not for him to ask for more than she would freely give; and if there was another man—well, he was a lucky dog. But if he'd played the fool—yes, by Heaven! if he'd played the fool, that was a different pair of shoes altogether. His forehead grew black at the thought, and mechanically his fists clenched.

"Dick, I'd like to tell you just how things are."

He pulled himself together and looked at the girl.

"It is meself that is at your service, my lady," he answered, quietly.

"I'm engaged. But it's a secret."

His jaw dropped. "Engaged!" he faltered. "But—who to? And why is it a secret?"

"I can't tell you who to. I promised to keep it secret; and then he suddenly went away and the war broke out and I've never seen him since."

"But you've heard from him?"

She bit her lip and looked away. "Not a line," she faltered.

"But—I don't understand." His tone was infinitely tender. "Why hasn't he written to you? Violet girl, why would he not have written?"

"You see, he's a——" She seemed to be nerving herself to speak. "You see, he's a German!"

It was out at last.

"Mother of God!" Dick leaned back in his chair, his eyes fixed on her, his cigarette unheeded, burning the tablecloth. "Do you love him?"

"Yes." The whispered answer was hardly audible. "Oh, Dick, I wonder if you can understand. It all came so suddenly, and then there was this war, and I know it's awful to love a German, but I do, and I can't tell anyone but you; they'd think it horrible of me. Oh, Dick! tell me you understand."

"I understand, little girl," he answered, very slowly. "I understand."

It was all very involved and infinitely pathetic. But,

as I have said before, Dick O'Rourke was a gallant gentleman.

"It's not his fault he's a German," she went on after a while. "He didn't start the war—and, you see, I promised him."

That was the rub—she'd promised him. Truly a woman is a wonderful thing! Very gentle and patient was O'Rourke with her that evening, and when at last he turned into his club, he sat for a long while gazing into the fire. Just once a muttered curse escaped his lips.

"Did you speak?" said the man in the next chair.

"I did *not*," said O'Rourke, and getting up abruptly he went to bed.

At 3 p.m. on April 22nd Dick O'Rourke received a wire. It was short and to the point. "Leave cancelled. Return at once." He tore round to Victoria, found he'd missed the boat-train, and went down to Folkestone on chance. For the time Moyra was almost forgotten. Officers are not recalled from short leave without good and sufficient reason; and as yet there was nothing in the evening papers that showed any activity. At Folkestone he met other officers—also recalled; and when the boat came in rumours began to spread. The whole line had fallen back—the

Germans were through and marching on Calais—a ghastly defeat had been sustained.

The morning papers were a little more reassuring; and in them for the first time came the mention of the word "gas." Everything was vague, but that something had happened was obvious, and also that that something was pretty serious.

One p.m. on the 23rd found him at Boulogne, ramping like a bull. An unemotional railway transport officer told him that there was a very nice train starting at midnight, but that the leave train was cancelled.

"But, man!" howled O'Rourke, "I've been recalled. 'Tis urgent!" He brandished the wire in his face.

The R.T.O. remained unmoved, and intimated that he was busy, and that O'Rourke's private history left him quite cold. Moreover, he thought it possible that the British Army might survive without him for another day.

In the general confusion that ensued on his replying that the said R.T.O. was no doubt a perfect devil as a traveller for unshrinkable underclothes, but that his knowledge of the British Army might be written on a postage-stamp, O'Rourke escaped, and ensconcing himself near the barrier, guarded by French sentries, at the top of the hill leading to St. Omer, he waited for a motor-car.

Having stopped two generals and been consigned

elsewhere for his pains, he ultimately boarded a flying corps lorry, and 4 p.m. found him at St. Omer. And there—but we will whisper—was a relative—one of the exalted ones of the earth, who possessed many motor-cars, great and small.

Dick chose the second Rolls-Royce, and having pursued his unit to the farm where he'd left it two days before, he chivied it round the country, and at length traced it to Poperinghe.

And there he found things moving. As yet no one was quite sure what had happened; but he found a solemn conclave of Army Service Corps officers attached to his division, and from them he gathered twenty or thirty of the conflicting rumours that were flying round. One thing, anyway, was clear: the Huns were not triumphantly marching on Calais—yet. It was just as a charming old boy of over fifty, who had perjured his soul over his age and had been out since the beginning—a standing reproach to a large percentage of the so-called youth of England—it was just as he suggested a little dinner in that hospitable town, prior to going up with the supply lorries, that with a droning roar a twelve-inch shell came crashing into the square. . . .

That night at 11 p.m. Dick stepped out of another car into a ploughed field just behind the little village of Woesten, and, having trodden on his major's face

and unearthed his servant, lay down by the dying fire to get what sleep he could. Now and again a horse whinnied near by; a bit rattled, a man cursed; for the unit was ready to move at a moment's notice and the horses were saddled up. The fire died out—from close by a battery was firing, and the sky was dancing with the flashes of bursting shells like summer lightning flickering in the distance. And with his head on a sharp stone and another in his back Dick O'Rourke fell asleep and dreamed of—but dreams are silly things to describe. It was just as he'd thrown the hors-d'œuvres at the head-waiter of Ciro's, who had suddenly become the hated German rival, and was wiping the potato salad off Moyra's face, which it had hit by mistake, with the table-cloth, that with a groan he turned on his other side—only to exchange the stones for a sardine tin and a broken pickle bottle. Which is really no more foolish than the rest of life nowadays. . . .

And now for a moment I must go back and, leaving our hero, describe shortly the events that led up to the sending of the wire that recalled him.

Early in the morning of April 22nd the Germans launched at that part of the French line which lay in front of the little villages of Elverdinge and Brielen, a yellowish-green cloud of gas, which rolled slowly over the intervening ground between the trenches,

carried on its way by a faint, steady breeze. I do not intend to describe the first use of that infamous invention—it has been done too often before. But, for the proper understanding of what follows, it is essential for me to go into a few details. Utterly unprepared for what was to come, the French divisions gazed for a short while spellbound at the strange phenomenon they saw coming slowly towards them. Like some liquid the heavy-coloured vapour poured relentlessly into the trenches, filled them, and passed on. For a few seconds nothing happened; the sweet-smelling stuff merely tickled their nostrils; they failed to realise the danger. Then, with inconceivable rapidity, the gas worked, and blind panic spread. Hundreds, after a dreadful fight for air, became unconscious and died where they lay—a death of hideous torture, with the frothing bubbles gurgling in their throats and the foul liquid welling up in their lungs. With blackened faces and twisted limbs one by one they drowned—only that which drowned them came from inside and not from out. Others, staggering, falling, lurching on, and of their ignorance keeping pace with the gas, went back. A hail of rifle-fire and shrapnel mowed them down, and the line was broken. There was nothing on the British left—their flank was up in the air. The north-east corner of the salient round Ypres had been pierced. From in front

of St. Julian, away up north towards Boesienge, there was no one in front of the Germans.

It is not my intention to do more than mention the rushing up of the cavalry corps and the Indians to fill the gap; the deathless story of the Canadians who, surrounded and hemmed in, fought till they died against overwhelming odds; the fate of the Northumbrian division—fresh from home—who were rushed up in support, and the field behind Fortuin where they were caught by shrapnel, and what was left. These things are outside the scope of my story. Let us go back to the gap.

Hard on the heels of the French came the Germans advancing. For a mile or so they pushed on, and why they stopped when they did is—as far as I am concerned—one of life's little mysteries. Perhaps the utter success of their gas surprised even them; perhaps they anticipated some trap; perhaps the incredible heroism of the Canadians in hanging up the German left caused their centre to push on too far and lose touch; perhaps—but, why speculate? I don't know, though possibly those in High Places may. The fact remains they did stop; their advantage was lost and the situation was saved.

Such was the state of affairs when O'Rourke opened his eyes on the morning of Saturday, April

24th. The horses were dimly visible through the heavy mist, his blankets were wringing wet, and hazily he wondered why he had ever been born. Then the cook dropped the bacon in the fire, and he groaned with anguish; visions of yesterday's grilled kidneys and hot coffee rose before him and mocked. By six o'clock he had fed, and sitting on an overturned biscuit-box beside the road he watched three batteries of French 75's pass by and disappear in the distance. At intervals he longed to meet the man who invented war. It must be remembered that, though I have given the situation as it really was, for the better understanding of the story, the facts at the time were not known at all clearly. The fog of war still wrapped in oblivion—as far as regimental officers were concerned, at any rate—the events which were taking place within a few miles of them.

When, therefore, Dick O'Rourke perceived an unshaven and unwashed warrior, garbed as a gunner officer, coming down the road from Woesten, and, moreover, recognised him as one of his own term at the "Shop," known to his intimates as the Land Crab, he hailed him with joy.

"All hail, oh, crustacean!" he cried, as the other came abreast of him. "Whither dost walk so blithely?"

"Halloa, Dick!" The gunner paused. "You haven't seen my major anywhere, have you?"

"Not that I'm aware of, but as I don't know your major from Adam, my evidence may not be reliable. What news from the seat of war?"

"None that I know of—except this cursed gun, that is rapidly driving me to drink."

"What cursed gun? I am fresh from Ciro's and the haunts of love and ease. Expound to me your enigma, my Land Crab."

"Haven't you heard? When the Germans——" He stopped suddenly. "Listen!" Perfectly clear from the woods to the north of them—the woods that lie to the west of the Woesten-Oostvleteren road, for those who may care for maps—there came the distinctive boom! crack! of a smallish gun. Three more shots, and then silence. The gunner turned to Dick.

"There you are—that's the gun."

"But how nice! Only, why curse it?"

"Principally because it's German; and those four shots that you have just heard have by this time burst in Poperinghe."

"What!" O'Rourke looked at him in amazement. "Is it my leg you would be pulling?"

"Certainly not. When the Germans came on in the first blind rush after the French two small guns on motor mountings got through behind our lines.

One was completely wrecked with its detachment. The motor mounting of the other you can see lying in a pond about a mile up the road. The gun is there." He pointed to the wood.

"And the next!" said O'Rourke. "D'you mean to tell me that there is a German gun in that wood firing at Poperinghe? Why, hang it, man! it's three miles behind our lines."

"Taking the direction those shells are coming from, the distance from Poperinghe to that gun must be more than ten miles—if the gun is behind the German trenches. Your gunnery is pretty rotten, I know, but if you know of any two-inch gun that shoots ten miles, I'll be obliged if you'll give me some lessons." The gunner lit a cigarette. "Man, we know it's not one of ours, we know where they all are; we know it's a Hun."

"Then, what in the name of fortune are ye standing here for talking like an ould woman with the indigestion? Away with you, and lead us to him, and don't go chivying after your bally major." Dick shouted for his revolver. "If there's a gun in that wood, bedad! we'll gun it."

"My dear old flick," said the other, "don't get excited. The woods have been searched with a line of men—twice; and devil the sign of the gun. You don't suppose they've got a concrete mounting and the

Prussian flag flying on a pole, do you? The detachment are probably dressed as Belgian peasants, and the gun is dismounted and hidden when it's not firing."

But O'Rourke would have none of it. "Get off to your major, then, and have your mothers' meeting. Then come back to me, and I'll give you the gun. And borrow a penknife and cut your beard—you'll be after frightening the natives."

That evening a couple of shots rang out from the same wood, two of the typical shots of a small gun. And then there was silence. A group of men standing by an estaminet on the road affirmed to having heard three faint shots afterwards like the crack of a sporting-gun or revolver; but in the general turmoil of an evening hate which was going on at the same time no one thought much about it. Half an hour later Dick O'Rourke returned, and there was a strange look in his eyes. His coat was torn, his collar and shirt were ripped open, and his right eye was gradually turning black. Of his doings he would vouchsafe no word. Only, as we sat down round the fire to dinner, the gunner subaltern of the morning passed again up the road.

"Got the gun yet, Dick?" he chaffed.

"I have that," answered O'Rourke, "also the detachment."

The Land Crab paused. "Where are they?"

"The gun is in a pond where you won't find it, and the detachment are dead—except one who escaped."

"Yes, I don't think." The gunner laughed and passed on.

"You needn't," answered Dick, "but that gun will never fire again."

It never did. As I say, he would answer no questions, and even amongst the few people who had heard of the thing at all, it soon passed into the limbo of forgotten things. Other and weightier matters were afoot; the second battle of Ypres did not leave much time for vague conjecture. And so when, a few days ago, the question was once again recalled to my mind by no less a person than O'Rourke himself, I had to dig in the archives of memory for the remembrance of an incident of which I had well-nigh lost sight.

"You remember that gun, Bill," he remarked, lying back in the arm-chair of the farmhouse where we were billeted, and sipping some hot rum—"that German gun that got through in April and bombarded Poperinghe? I want to talk to you about that gun." He started filling his pipe.

"'Tis the hardest proposition I've ever been up against, and sure I don't know what to do at all."

He was staring at the fire. "You remember the Land Crab and how he told us the woods had been searched? Well, it didn't take a superhuman brain-storm to realise that if what he said was right and the Huns were dressed as Belgian peasants, and the gun was a little one, that a line of men going through the woods had about as much chance of finding them as a terrier has of catching a tadpole in the water. I says to myself, 'Dick, my boy, this is an occasion for stealth, for delicate work, for finesse.' So off I went on my lonesome and hid in the wood. I argued that they couldn't be keeping a permanent watch, and that even if they'd seen me come in, they'd think in time I had gone out again, when they noticed no further sign of me. Also I guessed they didn't want to stir up a hornet's nest about their ears by killing me —they wanted no vulgar glare of publicity upon their doings. So, as I say, I hid in a hole and waited. I got bored stiff; though, when all was said and done, it wasn't much worse than sitting in that blessed ploughed field beside the road. About five o'clock I started cursing myself for a fool in listening to the story at all, it all seemed so ridiculous. Not a sound in the woods, not a breath of wind in the trees. The guns weren't firing, just for the time everything was peaceful. I'd got a caterpillar down my neck, and I was just coming back to get a drink and chuck it

up, when suddenly a Belgian labourer popped out from behind a tree. There was nothing peculiar about him, and if it hadn't been for the Land Crab's story I'd never have given him a second thought. He was just picking up sticks, but as I watched him I noticed that every now and then he straightened himself up, and seemed to peer around as if he was searching the undergrowth. The next minute out came another, and he started the stick-picking stunt too."

Dick paused to relight his pipe, then he laughed. "Of course, the humour of the situation couldn't help striking me. Dick O'Rourke in a filthy hole, covered with branches and bits of dirt, watching two mangy old Belgians picking up wood. But, having stood it the whole day, I made up my mind to wait, at any rate, till night. If only I could catch the gun in action —even if the odds were too great for me alone—I'd be able to spot the hiding-place, and come back later with a party and round them up.

"Then suddenly the evening hate started—artillery from all over the place—and with it the Belgian labourers ceased from plucking sticks. Running down a little path, so close to me that I could almost touch him, came one of them. He stopped about ten yards away where the dense undergrowth finished, and, after looking cautiously round, waved his hand. The other one nipped behind a tree and called out some-

thing in a guttural tone of voice. And then, I give you my word, out of the bowels of the earth there popped up a little gun not twenty yards from where I'd been lying the whole day. By this time, of course, I was in the same sort of condition as a terrier is when he's seen the cat he has set his heart on shin up a tree, having missed her tail by half an inch.

"They clapped her on a little mounting quick as light, laid her, loaded, and, by the holy saints! under my very nose, loosed off a present for Poperinghe. The man on guard waved his hand again, and bedad! away went another. The next instant he was back, again an exclamation in German, and in about two shakes the whole thing had disappeared, and there were the two labourers picking sticks. I give you my word it was like a clown popping up in a pantomime through a trap-door; I had to pinch myself to make certain I was awake.

"The next instant into the clearing came two English soldiers, the reason evidently of the sudden dismantling. Had they been armed we'd have had at them then and there; but, of course, so far behind the trenches, they had no rifles. They just peered round, saw the Belgians, and went off again. I heard their steps dying away in the distance, and decided to wait a bit longer. The two men seemed to be discussing what to do, and ultimately moved behind the tree

again, where I could hear them talking. At last they came to a decision, and picking up their bundles of sticks came slowly down the path past me. They were not going to fire again that evening."

Dick smiled reminiscently. "Bill, pass the rum. I'm thirsty."

"What did you do, Dick?" I asked, eagerly.

"What d'you think? I was out like a knife and let drive with my hand-gun. I killed the first one as dead as mutton, and missed the second, who shot like a stag into the undergrowth. Gad! It was great. I put two more where I thought he was, but as I still heard him crashing on I must have missed him. Then I nipped round the tree to find the gun. The only thing there was a great hole full of leaves. I ploughed across it, thinking it must be the other side, when, without a word of warning, I fell through the top—bang through the top, my boy, of the neatest hiding-place you've ever thought of. The whole of the centre of those leaves was a fake. There were about two inches of them supported on light hurdle-work. I was in the robber's cave with a vengeance."

"Was the gun there?" I cried, excitedly.

"It was. Also the Hun. The gun of small variety; the Hun of large—very large. I don't know which of us was the more surprised—him or me; we just stood gazing at one another.

"'Halloa, Englishman,' he said; 'come to leave a card?'

"'Quite right, Boche,' I answered. 'A p.p.c. one.'

"I was rather pleased with that touch at the time, old son. I was just going to elaborate it, and point out that he—as the dear departing—should really do it, when he was at me.

"Bill, my boy, you should have seen that fight. Like a fool, I never saw his revolver lying on the table, and I'd shoved my own back in my holster. He got it in his right hand, and I got his right wrist in my left. We'd each got the other by the throat, and one of us was for the count. We each knew that. At one time I thought he'd got me—we were crashing backwards and forwards, and I caught my head against a wooden pole which nearly stunned me. And, mark you, all the time I was expecting his pal to come back and inquire after his health. Then suddenly I felt him weaken, and I squeezed his throat the harder. It came quite quickly at the end. His pistol-hand collapsed, and I suppose muscular contraction pulled the trigger, for the bullet went through his head, though I think he was dead already." Dick O'Rourke paused, and looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"But why in the name of Heaven," I cried, irritably, "have you kept this dark all the while? Why didn't you tell us at the time?"

For a while he did not answer, and then he produced his pocket-book. From it he took a photograph, which he handed to me.

"Out of that German's pocket I took that photograph."

"Well," I said, "what about it? A very pretty girl for a German." Then I looked at it closely. "Why, it was taken in England. Is it an English girl?"

"Yes," he answered, dryly, "it is. It's Moyra Kavanagh, whom I proposed to forty-eight hours previously at Ciro's. She refused me, and told me then she was in love with a German. I celebrate the news by coming over here and killing him, in an individual fight where it was man to man."

"But," I cried, "good heavens! man—it was you or he."

"I know that," he answered, wearily. "What then? He evidently loved her; if not—why the photo. Look at what's written on the back—'From Moyra—with all my love.' All her love. Lord! it's a rum box up." He sighed wearily and slowly replaced it in his case. "So I buried him, and I chucked his gun in a pond, and said nothing about it. If I had it would probably have got into the papers or some such rot, and she'd have wanted to know all about it. Think of it! What the deuce would I have told her? To sympa-

thise and discuss her love affairs with her in London, and then toddle over here and slaughter him. Dash it, man, it's Gilbertian! And, mark you, nothing would induce me to marry her—even if she'd have me —without her knowing."

"But——" I began, and then fell silent. The more I thought of it the less I liked it. Put it how you like, for a girl to take as her husband a man who has actually killed the man she loved and was engaged to—German or no German—is a bit of a pill to swallow.

After mature consideration we decided to present the pill to her garbed in this form. On me—as a scribbler of sorts—descended the onus of putting it on paper. When I'd done it, and Dick had read it, he said I was a fool, and wanted to tear it up. Which is like a man. . . .

Look you, my lady, it was a fair fight—it was war—it was an Englishman against a German; and the best man won. And surely to Heaven you can't blame poor old Dick? He didn't know; how could he have known, how . . . but what's the use? If your heart doesn't bring it right—neither my pen nor my logic is likely to. Which is like a woman.

CHAPTER II

PRIVATE MEYRICK—COMPANY IDIOT

NO one who has ever given the matter a moment's thought would deny, I suppose, that a regiment without discipline is like a ship without a rudder. True as that fact has always been, it is doubly so now, when men are exposed to mental and physical shocks such as have never before been thought of.

The condition of a man's brain after he has sat in a trench and suffered an intensive bombardment for two or three hours can only be described by one word, and that is—numbed. The actual physical concussion, apart altogether from the mental terror, caused by the bursting of a succession of large shells in a man's vicinity, temporarily robs him of the use of his thinking faculties. He becomes half-stunned, dazed; his limbs twitch convulsively and involuntarily; he mutters foolishly—he becomes incoherent. Starting with fright he passes through that stage, passes beyond it into a condition bordering on coma; and when a man is in that condition he is not responsible for his actions. His brain has ceased to work. . . .

Now it is, I believe, a principle of psychology that the brain or mind of a man can be divided into two parts—the objective and the subjective: the objective being that part of his thought-box which is actuated by outside influences, by his senses, by his powers of deduction; the subjective being that part which is not directly controllable by what he sees and hears, the part which the religious might call his soul, the Buddhist "the Spark of God," others instinct. And this portion of a man's nature remains acutely active, even while the other part has struck work. In fact, the more numbed and comatose the thinking brain, the more clearly and insistently does subjective instinct hold sway over a man's body. Which all goes to show that discipline, if it is to be of any use to a man at such a time, must be a very different type of thing to what the ordinary, uninitiated, and so-called free civilian believes it to be. It must be an ideal, a thing where the motive counts, almost a religion. It must be an appeal to the soul of man, not merely an order to his body. That the order to his body, the self-control of his daily actions, the general change in his mode of life will infallibly follow on the heels of the appeal to his soul—if that appeal be successful—is obvious. But the appeal must come first: it must be the driving power; it must be the cause and not the effect. Otherwise, when the brain

is gone—numbed by causes outside its control; when the reasoning intellect of man is out of action—stunned for the time; when only his soul remains to pull the quivering, helpless body through,—then, unless that soul has the ideal of discipline in it, it will fail. And failure *may* mean death and disaster; it *will* mean shame and disgrace, when sanity returns. . . .

To the man seated at his desk in the company office these ideas were not new. He had been one of the original Expeditionary Force; but a sniper had sniped altogether too successfully out by Zillebecke in the early stages of the first battle of Ypres, and when that occurs a rest cure becomes necessary. At that time he was the senior subaltern of one of the finest regiments of "a contemptible little army"; now he was a major commanding a company in the tenth battalion of that same regiment. And in front of him on the desk, a yellow form pinned to a white slip of flimsy paper, announced that No. 8469, Private Meyrick, J., was for office. The charge was "Late falling in on the 8 a.m. parade," and the evidence against him was being given by C.-S.-M. Hayton, also an old soldier from that original battalion at Ypres. It was Major Seymour himself who had seen the late appearance of the above-mentioned Private Meyrick, and who had ordered the yellow form to be prepared.

And now with it in front of him, he stared musingly at the office fire. . . .

There are a certain number of individuals who from earliest infancy have been imbued with the idea that the chief pastime of officers in the army, when they are not making love to another man's wife, is the preparation of harsh and tyrannical rules for the express purpose of annoying their men, and the gloating infliction of drastic punishment on those that break them. The absurdity of this idea has nothing to do with it, it being a well-known fact that the more absurd an idea is, the more utterly fanatical do its adherents become. To them the thought that a man being late on parade should make him any the worse fighter—especially as he had, in all probability, some good and sufficient excuse—cannot be grasped. To them the idea that men may not be a law unto themselves—though possibly agreed to reluctantly in the abstract—cannot possibly be assimilated in the concrete.

"He has committed some trifling offence," they say; "now you will give him some ridiculous punishment. That is the curse of militarism—a chosen few rule by Fear." And if you tell them that any attempt to inculcate discipline by fear alone must of necessity fail, and that far from that being the method in the

Army the reverse holds good, they will not believe you. Yet—it is so. . . .

"Shall I bring in the prisoner, sir?" The Sergeant-Major was standing by the door.

"Yes, I'll see him now." The officer threw his cigarette into the fire and put on his hat.

"Take off your 'at. Come along there, my lad—move. You'd go to sleep at your mother's funeral—you would." Seymour smiled at the conversation outside the door; he had soldiered many years with that Sergeant-Major. "Now, step up briskly. Quick march. 'Alt. Left turn." He closed the door and ranged himself alongside the prisoner facing the table.

"No. 8469, Private Meyrick—you are charged with being late on the 8 a.m. parade this morning. Sergeant-Major, what do you know about it?"

"Sir, on the 8 a.m. parade this morning, Private Meyrick came running on 'alf a minute after the bugle sounded. 'Is puttees were not put on tidily. I'd like to say, sir, that it's not the first time this man has been late falling in. 'E seems to me to be always a dreaming, somehow—not properly awake like. I warned 'im for office."

The officer's eyes rested on the hatless soldier facing him. "Well, Meyrick," he said quietly, "what have you got to say?"

"Nothing, sir. I'm sorry as 'ow I was late. I was reading, and I never noticed the time."

"What were you reading?" The question seemed superfluous—almost foolish; but something in the eyes of the man facing him, something in his short, stumpy, uncouth figure interested him.

"I was a'reading Kipling, sir." The Sergeant-Major snorted as nearly as such an august disciplinarian could snort in the presence of his officer.

" 'E ought, sir, to 'ave been 'elping the cook's mate —until 'e was due on parade."

"Why do you read Kipling or anyone else when you ought to be doing other things?" queried the officer. His interest in the case surprised himself; the excuse was futile, and two or three days to barracks is an excellent corrective.

"I dunno, sir. 'E sort of gets 'old of me, like. Makes me want to do things—and then I can't. I've always been slow and awkward like, and I gets a bit flustered at times. But I do try 'ard." Again a doubtful noise from the Sergeant-Major; to him trying 'ard and reading Kipling when you ought to be swabbing up dishes were hardly compatible.

For a moment or two the officer hesitated, while the Sergeant-Major looked frankly puzzled. "What the blazes 'as come over 'im," he was thinking; "surely he ain't going to be guyed by that there wash. Why

don't 'e give 'im two days and be done with it—and me with all them returns."

"I'm going to talk to you, Meyrick." Major Seymour's voice cut in on these reflections. For the fraction of a moment "Two days C.B." had been on the tip of his tongue, and then he'd changed his mind. "I want to try and make you understand why you were brought up to office to-day. In every community—in every body of men—there must be a code of rules which govern what they do. Unless those rules are carried out by all those men, the whole system falls to the ground. Supposing everyone came on to parade half a minute late because they'd been reading Kipling?"

"I know, sir. I see as 'ow I was wrong. But—I dreams sometimes as 'ow I'm like them he talks about, when 'e says as 'ow they lifted 'em through the charge as won the day. And then the dream's over, and I know as 'ow I'm not."

The Sergeant-Major's impatience was barely concealed; those returns were oppressing him horribly.

"You can get on with your work, Sergeant-Major. I know you're busy." Seymour glanced at the N.C.O. "I want to say a little more to Meyrick."

The scandalised look on his face amused him; to leave a prisoner alone with an officer—impossible, unheard of.

"I am in no hurry, sir, thank you."

"All right then," Seymour spoke briefly. "Now, Meyrick, I want you to realise that the principle at the bottom of all discipline is the motive that makes that discipline. I want you to realise that all these rules are made for the good of the regiment, and that in everything you do and say you have an effect on the regiment. You count in the show, and I count in it, and so does the Sergeant-Major. We're all out for the same thing, my lad, and that is the regiment. We do things not because we're afraid of being punished if we don't, but because we know that they are for the good of the regiment—the finest regiment in the world. You've got to make good, not because you'll be dropped on if you don't, but because you'll pull the regiment down if you fail. And because you count, you, personally, must not be late on parade. It *does* matter what you do yourself. I want you to realise that, and why. The rules you are ordered to comply with are the best rules. Sometimes we alter one—because we find a better; but they're the best we can get, and before you can find yourself in the position of the men you dream about—the men who lift others, the men who lead others—you've got to lift and lead yourself. Nothing is too small to worry about, nothing too insignificant. And because I think, that at the back of your head

somewhere you've got the right idea; because I think it's natural to you to be a bit slow and awkward and that your failure isn't due to laziness or slackness, I'm not going to punish you this time for breaking the rules. If you do it again, it will be a different matter. There comes a time when one can't judge motives; when one can only judge results. Case dismissed."

Thoughtfully the officer lit a cigarette as the door closed, and though for the present there was nothing more for him to do in office, he lingered on, pursuing his train of thoughts. Fully conscious of the aggrieved wrath of his Sergeant-Major at having his time wasted, a slight smile spread over his face. He was not given to making perorations of this sort, and now that it was over he wondered rather why he'd done it. And then he recalled the look in the private's eyes as he had spoken of his dreams.

"He'll make good that man." Unconsciously he spoke aloud. "He'll make good."

The discipline of habit is what we soldiers had before the war, and that takes time. Now it must be the discipline of intelligence, of ideal. And for that fear is the worst conceivable teacher. We have no time to form habits now; the routine of the army is of too short duration before the test comes. And the test is too crushing. . . .

The bed-rock now as then is the same, only the methods of getting down to that bed-rock have to be more hurried. Of old habitude and constant association instilled a religion—the religion of obedience, the religion of esprit de corps. But it took time. Now we need the same religion, but we haven't the same time.

. . . . . .

In the office next door the Sergeant-Major was speaking soft words to the Pay Corporal.

"Blimey, I dunno what's come over the bloke. You know that there Meyrick . . ."

"Who, the Slug?" interpolated the other.

"Yes. Well 'e come shambling on to parade this morning with 'is puttees flapping round his ankles —late as usual; and 'e told me to run 'im up to office." A thumb indicated the Major next door. "When I gets 'im there, instead of giving 'im three days C.B. and being done with it, 'e starts a lot of jaw about motives and discipline. 'E hadn't got no ruddy excuse; said 'e was a'reading Kipling, or some such rot—when 'e ought to have been 'elping the cook's mate."

"What did he give him?" asked the Pay Corporal, interested.

"Nothing. His blessing and dismissed the case. As if I had nothing better to do than listen to 'im

talking 'ot air to a perisher like that there Meyrick. 'Ere, pass over them musketry returns."

Which conversation, had Seymour overheard it, he would have understood and fully sympathised with. For C.-S.-M. Hayton, though a prince of sergeant-majors, was no student of physiology. To him a spade was a spade only as long as it shovelled earth.

. . . . . .

Now, before I go on to the day when the subject of all this trouble and talk was called on to make good, and how he did it, a few words on the man himself might not be amiss. War, the great forcing house of character, admits no lies. Sooner or later it finds out a man, and he stands in the pitiless glare of truth for what he is. And it is not by any means the cheery hail-fellow-well-met type, or the thruster, or the sportsman, who always pool the most votes when the judging starts. . . .

John Meyrick, before he began to train for the great adventure, had been something in a warehouse down near Tilbury. And "something" is about the best description of what he was that you could give. Moreover there wasn't a dog's chance of his ever being "anything." He used to help the young man —I should say young gentleman—who checked weigh bills at one of the dock entrances. More than that I cannot say, and incidentally the subject is not of

surpassing importance. His chief interests in life were contemplating the young gentleman, listening open-mouthed to his views on life, and, dreaming. Especially the latter. Sometimes he would go after the day's work, and, sitting down on a bollard, his eyes would wander over the lines of some dirty tramp, with her dark-skinned crew. Visions of wonderful seas and tropic islands, of leafy palms with the blue-green surf thundering in towards them, of coral reefs and glorious-coloured flowers, would run riot in his brain. Not that he particularly wanted to go and see these figments of his imagination for himself; it was enough for him to dream of them—to conjure them up for a space in his mind by the help of an actual concrete ship—and then to go back to his work of assisting his loquacious companion. He did not find the work uncongenial; he had no hankerings after other modes of life—in fact the thought of any change never even entered into his calculations. What the future might hold he neither knew nor cared; the expressions of his companion on the rottenness of life in general and their firm in particular awoke no answering chord in his breast. He had enough to live on in his little room at the top of a tenement house—he had enough over for an occasional picture show—and he had his dreams. He was content.

Then came the war. For a long while it passed

him by; it was no concern of his, and it didn't enter his head that it was ever likely to be until one night, as he was going in to see "Jumping Jess, or the Champion Girl Cowpuncher" at the local movies, a recruiting sergeant touched him on the arm.

He was not a promising specimen for a would-be soldier, but that recruiting sergeant was not new to the game, and he'd seen worse.

"Why aren't you in khaki, young fellow me lad?" he remarked genially.

The idea, as I say, was quite new to our friend. Even though that very morning his colleague in the weigh-bill pastime had chucked it and joined, even though he'd heard a foreman discussing who they were to put in his place as "that young Meyrick was habsolutely 'opeless," it still hadn't dawned on him that he might go too. But the recruiting sergeant was a man of some knowledge; in his daily round he encountered many and varied types. In two minutes he had fired the boy's imagination with a glowing and partially true description of the glories of war and the army, and supplied him with another set of dreams to fill his brain. Wasting no time, he struck while the iron was hot, and in a few minutes John Meyrick, sometime checker of weigh-bills, died, and No. 8469, Private John Meyrick, came into being. . . .

But though you change a man's vocation with the

stroke of a pen, you do not change his character. A dreamer he was in the beginning, and a dreamer he remained to the end. And dreaming, as I have already pointed out, was not a thing which commended itself to Company-Sergeant-Major Hayton, who in due course became one of the chief arbiters of our friend's destinies. True it was no longer coral islands—but such details availed not with cook's mates and other busy movers in the regimental hive. Where he'd got them from, Heaven knows, those tattered volumes of Kipling; but their matchless spirit had caught his brain and fired his soul, with the result—well, the first of them has been given.

There were more results to follow. Not three days after he was again upon the mat for the same offence, only to say much the same as before.

"I do try, sir—I do try; but some'ow——"

And though in the bottom of his heart the officer believed him, though in a very strange way he felt interested in him, there are limits and there are rules. There comes a time, as he had said, when one can't judge by motives, when one can only judge by results.

"You mustn't only try; you must succeed. Three days to barracks."

. . . . . .

That night in mess the officer sat next to the Colonel. "It's the thrusters, the martinets, the men of action

who win the V.C.'s and D.C.M.'s, my dear fellow," said his C.O., as he pushed along the wine. "But it's the dreamers, the idealists who deserve them. They suffer so much more."

And as Major Seymour poured himself out a glass of port, a face came into his mind—the face of a stumpy, uncouth man with deep-set eyes. "I wonder," he murmured—"I wonder."

. . . . . .

The opportunities for stirring deeds of heroism in France do not occur with great frequency, whatever outsiders may think to the contrary. For months on end a battalion may live a life of peace and utter boredom, getting a few casualties now and then, occasionally bagging an unwary Hun, vegetating continuously in the same unprepossessing hole in the ground—saving only when they go to another, or retire to a town somewhere in rear to have a bath. And the battalion to which No. 8469, Private Meyrick, belonged was no exception to the general rule.

For five weeks they had lived untroubled by anything except flies—all of them, that is, save various N.C.O.'s in A company. To them flies were quite a secondary consideration when compared to their other worry. And that, it is perhaps superfluous to add, was Private Meyrick himself.

Every day the same scene would be enacted; every

day some sergeant or corporal would dance with rage as he contemplated the Company Idiot—the title by which he was now known to all and sundry.

"Wake up! Wake up! Lumme, didn't I warn you —didn't I warn yer 'arf an 'our ago over by that there tree, when you was a-staring into the branches looking for nuts or something—didn't I warn yer that the company was parading at 10.15 for 'ot baths?"

"I didn't 'ear you, Corporal—I didn't really."

"Didn't 'ear me! Wot yer mean, didn't 'ear me? My voice ain't like the twitter of a grass'opper, is it? It's my belief you're balmy, my boy, B-A-R-M-Y. Savez. Get a move on yer, for Gawd's sake! You ought to 'ave a nurse. And when you gets to the bath-'ouse, for 'Eaven's sake pull yerself together! Don't forget to take off yer clothes before yer gets in; and when they lets the water out, don't go stopping in the bath because you forgot to get out. I wouldn't like another regiment to see you lying about when they come. They might say things."

And so with slight variations the daily strafe went on. Going up to the trenches it was always Meyrick who got lost; Meyrick who fell into shell holes and lost his rifle or the jam for his section; Meyrick who forgot to lie down when a flare went up, but stood vacantly gazing at it until partially stunned by his next-door neighbour. Periodically messages would

come through from the next regiment asking if they'd lost the regimental pet, and that he was being returned. It was always Meyrick. . . .

"I can't do nothing with 'im, sir." It was the Company-Sergeant-Major speaking to Seymour. "'E seems soft like in the 'ead. Whenever 'e does do anything and doesn't forget, 'e does it wrong. 'E's always dreaming and 'alf balmy."

"He's not a flier, I know, Sergeant-Major, but we've got to put up with all sorts nowadays," returned the officer diplomatically. "Send him to me, and let me have a talk to him."

"Very good, sir; but 'e'll let us down badly one of these days."

And so once again Meyrick stood in front of his company officer, and was encouraged to speak of his difficulties. To an amazing degree he had remembered the discourse he had listened to many months previously; to do something for the regiment was what he desired more than anything—to do something big, really big. He floundered and stopped; he could find no words. . . .

"But don't you understand that it's just as important to do the little things? If you can't do them, you'll never do the big ones."

"Yes, sir—I sees that; I do try, sir, and then I gets thinking, and some'ow—oh! I dunno—but every-

thing goes out of my head like. I wants the regiment to be proud of me—and then they calls me the Company Idiot." There was something in the man's face that touched Seymour.

"But how can the regiment be proud of you, my lad," he asked gently, "if you're always late on parade, and forgetting to do what you're told? If I wasn't certain in my own mind that it wasn't slackness and disobedience on your part, I should ask the Colonel to send you back to England as useless."

An appealing look came into the man's eyes. "Oh! don't do that, sir. I will try 'ard—straight I will."

"Yes, but as I told you once before, there comes a time when one must judge by results. Now, Meyrick, you must understand this finally. Unless you do improve, I shall do what I said. I shall tell the Colonel that you're not fitted to be a soldier, and I shall get him to send you away. I can't go on much longer; you're more trouble than you're worth. We're going up to the trenches again to-night, and I shall watch you. That will do; you may go."

And so it came about that the Company Idiot entered on what was destined to prove the big scene in his uneventful life under the eyes of a critical audience. To the Sergeant-Major, who was a gross materialist, failure was a foregone conclusion; to the company officer, who went a little nearer to the

heart of things, the issue was doubtful. Possibly his threat would succeed; possibly he'd struck the right note. And the peculiar thing is that both proved right according to their own lights. . . .

. . . . . .

This particular visit to the trenches was destined to be of a very different nature to former ones. On previous occasions peace had reigned; nothing untoward had occurred to mar the quiet restful existence which trench life so often affords to its devotees. But this time. . . .

It started about six o'clock in the morning on the second day of their arrival—a really pleasant little intensive bombardment. A succession of shells came streaming in, shattering every yard of the front line with tearing explosions. Then the Huns turned on the gas and attacked behind it. A few reached the trenches—the majority did not; and the ground outside was covered with grey-green figures, some of which were writhing and twitching and some of which were still. The attack had failed. . . .

But that sort of thing leaves its mark on the defenders, and this was their first baptism of real fire. Seymour had passed rapidly down the trench when he realised that for the moment it was over; and though men's faces were covered with the hideous gas masks, he saw by the twitching of their hands

and by the ugly high-pitched laughter he heard that it would be well to get into touch with those behind. Moreover, in every piece of trench there lay motionless figures in khaki. . . .

It was as he entered his dugout that the bombardment started again. Quickly he went to the telephone, and started to get on to brigade headquarters. It took him twenty seconds to realise that the line had been cut, and then he cursed dreadfully. The roar of the bursting shells was deafening; his cursing was inaudible; but in a fit of almost childish rage—he kicked the machine. Men's nerves are jangled at times. . . .

It was merely coincidence doubtless, but a motionless figure in a gas helmet crouching outside the dugout saw that kick, and slowly in his bemused brain there started a train of thought. Why should his company officer do such a thing; why should they all be cowering in the trench waiting for death to come to them; why . . . ? For a space his brain refused to act; then it started again.

Why was that man lying full length at the bottom of the trench, with the great hole torn out of his back, and the red stream spreading slowly round him; why didn't it stop instead of filling up the little holes at the bottom of the trench and then overflowing into the next one? He was the corporal who'd called him balmy; but why should he be dead? He was dead—

at least the motionless watcher thought he must be. He lay so still, and his body seemed twisted and unnatural. But why should one of the regiment be dead; it was all so unexpected, so sudden? And why did his Major kick the telephone? . . .

For a space he lay still, thinking; trying to figure things out. He suddenly remembered tripping over a wire coming up to the trench, and being cursed by his sergeant for lurching against him. "You would," he had been told—"you would. If it ain't a wire, you'd fall over yer own perishing feet."

"What's the wire for, sergint?" he had asked.

"What d'you think, softie. Drying the washing on? It's the telephone wire to Headquarters."

It came all back to him, and it had been over by the stunted pollard that he'd tripped up. Then he looked back at the silent, motionless figure—the red stream had almost reached him—and the Idea came. It came suddenly—like a blow. The wire must be broken, otherwise the officer wouldn't have kicked the telephone; he'd have spoken through it.

"I wants the regiment to be proud of me—and then they calls me the Company Idiot." He couldn't do the little things—he was always forgetting, but . . . ! What was that about "lifting 'em through the charge that won the day"? There was no charge, but there was the regiment. And the regiment was

wanting him at last. Something wet touched his fingers, and when he looked at them, they were red. "B-A-R-M-Y. You ought to 'ave a nurse. . . ."

Then once again coherent thought failed him—utter physical weakness gripped him—he lay comatose, shuddering, and crying softly over he knew not what. The sweat was pouring down his face from the heat of the gas helmet, but still he held the valve between his teeth, breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth as he had been told. It was automatic, involuntary; he couldn't think, he only remembered certain things by instinct.

Suddenly a high explosive shell burst near him—quite close: and a mass of earth crashed down on his legs and back, half burying him. He whimpered feebly, and after a while dragged himself free. But the action brought him close to that silent figure, with the ripped up back. . . .

"You ought to 'ave a nurse . . ." Why? Gawd above—why? Wasn't he as good a man as that there dead corporal? Wasn't he one of the regiment too? And now the Corporal couldn't do anything, but he —well, he hadn't got no hole torn out of his back. It wasn't his blood that lay stagnant, filling the little holes at the bottom of the trench. . . .

Kipling came back to him—feebly, from another world. The dreamer was dreaming once again.

"If your officer's dead and the sergeants look white,
Remember it's ruin to run from a fight."

Run! Who was talking of running? He was going to save the regiment—once he could think clearly again. Everything was hazy just for the moment.

"And wait for supports like a soldier."

But there weren't no supports, and the telephone wire was broken—the wire he'd tripped over as he came up. Until it was mended there wouldn't be any supports—until it was mended—until——

With a choking cry he lurched to his feet: and staggering, running, falling down, the dreamer crossed the open. A tearing pain through his left arm made him gasp, but he got there—got there and collapsed. He couldn't see very well, so he tore off his gas helmet, and, peering round, at last saw the wire. And the wire was indeed cut. Why the throbbing brain should have imagined it would be cut *there,* I know not; perhaps he associated it particularly with the pollard—and after all he was the Company Idiot. But it was cut there, I am glad to say; let us not begrudge him his little triumph. He found one end, and some few feet off he saw the other. With infinite difficulty he dragged himself towards it. Why did he find it so

terribly hard to move? He couldn't see clearly; everything somehow was getting hazy and red. The roar of the shells seemed muffled strangely—far-away, indistinct. He pulled at the wire, and it came towards him; pulled again, and the two ends met. Then he slipped back against the pollard, the two ends grasped in his right hand. . . .

The regiment was safe at last. The officer would not have to kick the telephone again. The Idiot had made good. And into his heart there came a wonderful peace.

There was a roaring in his ears; lights danced before his eyes; strange shapes moved in front of him. Then, of a sudden, out of the gathering darkness a great white light seared his senses, a deafening crash overwhelmed him, a sharp stabbing blow struck his head. The roaring ceased, and a limp figure slipped down and lay still, with two ends of wire grasped tight in his hand.

"They are going to relieve us to-night, Sergeant-Major." The two men with tired eyes faced one another in the Major's dugout. The bombardment was over, and the dying rays of a blood-red sun glinted through the door. "I think they took it well."

"They did, sir—very well."

"What are the casualties? Any idea?"

"Somewhere about seventy or eighty, sir—but I don't know the exact numbers."

"As soon as it's dark I'm going back to headquarters. Captain Standish will take command."

"That there Meyrick is reported missing, sir."

"Missing! He'll turn up somewhere—if he hasn't been hit."

"Probably walked into the German trenches by mistake," grunted the C.-S.-M. dispassionately, and retired. Outside the dugout men had moved the corporal; but the red pools still remained—stagnant at the bottom of the trench. . . .

"Well, you're through all right now, Major," said a voice in the doorway, and an officer with the white and blue brassard of the signals came in and sat down. "There are so many wires going back that have been laid at odd times, that it's difficult to trace them in a hurry." He gave a ring on the telephone, and in a moment the thin, metallic voice of the man at the other end broke the silence.

"All right. Just wanted to make sure we were through. Ring off."

"I remember kicking that damn thing this morning when I found we were cut off," remarked Seymour, with a weary smile. "Funny how childish one is at times."

"Aye—but natural. This war's damnable." The

two men fell silent. "I'll have a bit of an easy here," went on the signal officer after a while, "and then go down with you."

A few hours later the two men clambered out of the back of the trench. "It's easier walking, and I know every stick," remarked the Major. "Make for that stunted pollard first."

Dimly the tree stood outlined against the sky—a conspicuous mark and signpost. It was the signal officer who tripped over it first—that huddled quiet body, and gave a quick ejaculation. "Somebody caught it here, poor devil. Look out—duck."

A flare shot up into the night, and by its light the two motionless officers close to the pollard looked at what they had found.

"How the devil did he get here!" muttered Seymour. "It's one of my men."

"Was he anywhere near you when you kicked the telephone?" asked the other, and his voice was a little hoarse.

"He may have been—I don't know. Why?"

"Look at his right hand." From the tightly clenched fingers two broken ends of wire stuck out.

"Poor lad." The Major bit his lip. "Poor lad—I wonder. They called him the Company Idiot. Do you think . . . ?"

"I think he came out to find the break in the wire," said the other quietly. "And in doing so he found the answer to the big riddle."

"I knew he'd make good—I knew it all along. He used to dream of big things—something big for the regiment."

"And he's done a big thing, by Jove," said the signal officer gruffly, "for it's the motive that counts. And he couldn't know that he'd got the wrong wire."

. . . . . .

"When 'e doesn't forget, 'e does things wrong."

As I said, both the Sergeant-Major and his officer proved right according to their own lights.

CHAPTER III

SPUD TREVOR OF THE RED HUSSARS

IT would be but a small exaggeration to say that in every God-forsaken hole and corner of the world, where soldiers lived and moved and had their being, before Nemesis overtook Europe, the name of Spud Trevor of the Red Hussars was known. From Simla to Singapore, from Khartoum to the Curragh his name was symbolical of all that a regimental officer should be. Senior subalterns guiding the erring feet of the young and frivolous from the tempting paths of night clubs and fair ladies, to the infinitely better ones of hunting and sport, were apt to quote him. Adjutants had been known to hold him up as an example to those of their flock who needed chastening for any of the hundred and one things that adjutants do not like—if they have their regiment at heart. And he deserved it all.

I, who knew him, as well perhaps as anyone; I, who was privileged to call him friend, and yet in the hour of his greatest need failed him; I, to whose lot it has fallen to remove the slur from his name, state

this in no half-hearted way. He deserved it, and a thousand times as much again. He was the type of man beside whom the ordinary English gentleman—the so-called white man—looked dirty-grey in comparison. And yet there came a day when men who had openly fawned on him left the room when he came in, when whispers of an unsuspected yellow streak in him began to circulate, when senior subalterns no longer held him up as a model. Now he is dead: and it has been left to me to vindicate him. Perchance by so doing I may wipe out a little of the stain of guilt that lies so heavy on my heart; perchance I may atone, in some small degree, for my doubts and suspicions; and, perchance too, the whitest man that ever lived may of his understanding and knowledge, perfected now in the Great Silence to which he has gone, accept my tardy reparation, and forgive. It is only yesterday that the document, which explained everything, came into my hands. It was sent to me sealed, and with it a short covering letter from a firm of solicitors stating that their client was dead—killed in France—and that according to his instructions they were forwarding the enclosed, with the request that I should make such use of it as I saw fit.

To all those others, who, like myself, doubted, I address these words. Many have gone under: to them I venture to think everything is now clear. May-

be they have already met Spud, in the great vast gulfs where the mists of illusion are rolled away. For those who still live, he has no abuse—that incomparable sportsman and sahib; no recriminations for us who ruined his life. He goes farther, and finds excuses for us; God knows we need them. Here is what he has written. The document is reproduced exactly as I received it—saving only that I have altered all names. The man, whom I have called Ginger Bathurst, and everyone else concerned, will, I think, recognise themselves. And, pour les autres—let them guess.

. . . . . .

In two days, old friend, my battalion sails for France; and, now with the intention full formed and fixed in my mind, that I shall not return, I have determined to put down on paper the true facts of what happened three years ago: or rather, the true motives that impelled me to do what I did. I put it that way, because you already know the facts. You know that I was accused of saving my life at the expense of a woman's when the *Astoria* foundered in mid-Atlantic; you know that I was accused of having thrust her aside and taken her place in the boat. That accusation is true. I did save my life at a woman's expense. But the motives that impelled my action you do not know, nor the identity of the woman concerned. I hope

and trust that when you have read what I shall write you will exonerate me from the charge of a cowardice, vile and abominable beyond words, and at the most only find me guilty of a mistaken sense of duty. These words will only reach you in the event of my death; do with them what you will. I should like to think that the old name was once again washed clean of the dirty blot it has on it now; so do your best for me, old pal, do your best.

You remember Ginger Bathurst—of course you do. Is he still a budding Staff Officer at the War Office, I wonder, or is he over the water? I'm out of touch with the fellows in these days—(*the pathos of it: Spud out of touch, Spud of all men, whose soul was in the Army*)—one doesn't live in the back of beyond for three years and find Army lists and gazettes growing on the trees. You remember also, I suppose, that I was best man at his wedding when he married the Comtesse de Grecin. I told you at the time that I was not particularly enamoured of his choice, but it was *his* funeral; and with the old boy asking me to steer him through, I had no possible reason for refusing. Not that I had anything against the woman: she was charming, fascinating, and had a pretty useful share of this world's boodle. Moreover, she seemed extraordinarily in love with Ginger, and was just the sort of woman to push an ambitious fellow like him

right up to the top of the tree. He, of course, was simply idiotic: he was stark, raving mad about her; vowed she was the most peerless woman that ever a wretched being like himself had been privileged to look at; loaded her with presents which he couldn't afford, and generally took it a good deal worse than usual. I think, in a way, it was the calm acceptance of those presents that first prejudiced me against her. Naturally I saw a lot of her before they were married, being such a pal of Ginger's, and I did my best for his sake to overcome my dislike. But he wasn't a wealthy man—at the most he had about six hundred a year private means—and the presents of jewellery alone that he gave her must have made a pretty large hole in his capital.

However that is all by the way. They were married, and shortly afterwards I took my leave big game shooting and lost sight of them for a while. When I came back Ginger was at the War Office, and they were living in London. They had a delightful little flat in Hans Crescent, and she was pushing him as only a clever woman can push. Everybody who could be of the slightest use to him sooner or later got roped in to dinner and was duly fascinated.

To an habitual onlooker like myself, the whole thing was clear, and I must quite admit that much of my first instinctive dislike—and dislike is really too strong

a word—evaporated. She went out of her way to be charming to me, not that I could be of any use to the old boy, but merely because I was his great friend; and of course she knew that I realised—what he never dreamed of—that she was paving the way to pull some really big strings for him later.

I remember saying good-bye to her one afternoon after a luncheon, at which I had watched with great interest the complete capitulation of two generals and a well-known diplomatist.

"You're a clever man, Mr. Spud," she murmured, with that charming air of taking one into her confidence, with which a woman of the world routs the most confirmed misogynist. "If only Ginger——" She broke off and sighed: just the suggestion of a sigh; but sufficient to imply—lots.

"My lady," I answered, "keep him fit; make him take exercise: above all things don't let him get fat. Even you would be powerless with a fat husband. But provided you keep him thin, and never let him decide anything for himself, he will live to be a lasting monument and example of what a woman can do. And warriors and statesmen shall bow down and worship, what time they drink tea in your boudoir and eat buns from your hand. Bismillah!"

But time is short, and these details are trifling. Only once again, old pal, I am living in the days

when I moved in the pleasant paths of life, and the temptation to linger is strong. Bear with me a moment. I am a sybarite for the moment in spirit: in reality—God! how it hurts.

"Gentlemen rankers out on the spree,
Damned from here to eternity:
God have mercy on such as we.
Bah! Yah! Bah!"

I never thought I should live to prove Kipling's lines. But that's what I am—a gentleman ranker; going out to the war of wars—a private. I, and that's the bitterest part of it, I, who had, as you know full well, always, for years, lived for this war, the war against those cursed Germans. I knew it was coming—you'll bear me witness of that fact—and the cruel irony of fate that has made that very knowledge my downfall is not the lightest part of the little bundle fate has thrown on my shoulders. Yes, old man, we're getting near the motives now; but all in good time. Let me lay it out dramatically; don't rob me of my exit—I'm feeling a bit theatrical this evening. It may interest you to know that I saw Lady Delton to-day: she's a V.A.D., and did not recognise me, thank Heaven!

(*Need I say again that Delton is not the name he wrote. Sufficient that she and Spud knew one another*

very well, in other days. But in some men it would have emphasised the bitterness of spirit.)

Let's get on with it. A couple of years passed, and the summer of 1912 found me in New York. I was temporarily engaged on a special job which it is unnecessary to specify. It was not a very important one, but, as you know, a gift of tongues and a liking for poking my nose into the affairs of nations had enabled me to get a certain amount of more or less diplomatic work. The job was over, and I was merely marking time in New York waiting for the *Astoria* to sail. Two days before she was due to leave, and just as I was turning into the doors of my hotel, I ran full tilt into von Basel—a very decent fellow in the Prussian Guard—who was seconded and doing military attaché work in America. I'd met him off and on hunting in England—one of the few Germans I know who really went well to hounds.

"Hullo! Trevor," he said, as we met. "What are you doing here?"

"Marking time," I answered. "Waiting for my boat."

We strolled to the bar, and over a cocktail he suggested that if I had nothing better to do I might as well come to some official ball that was on that evening. "I can get you a card," he remarked. "You

ought to come; your friend, Mrs. Bathurst—Comtesse de Grecin that was—is going to be present."

"I'd no idea she was this side of the water," I said, surprised.

"Oh, yes! Come over to see her people or something. Well! will you come?"

I agreed, having nothing else on, and as he left the hotel, he laughed. "Funny the vagaries of fate. I don't suppose I come into this hotel once in three months. I only came down this evening to tell a man not to come and call as arranged, as my kid has got measles—and promptly ran into you."

Truly the irony of circumstances! If one went back far enough, one might find that the determining factor of my disgrace was the quarrel of a nurse and her lover which made her take the child another walk than usual and pick up infection. Dash it all! you might even find that it was a spot on her nose that made her do so, as she didn't want to meet him when not looking at her best! But that way madness lies.

Whatever the original cause—I went: and in due course met the Comtesse. She gave me a couple of dances, and I found that she, too, had booked her passage on the *Astoria*. I met very few people I knew, and having found it the usual boring stunt, I decided to get a glass of champagne and a sandwich

and then retire to bed. I took them along to a small alcove where I could smoke a cigarette in peace, and sat down. It was as I sat down that I heard from behind a curtain which completely screened me from view, the words "English Army" spoken in German. And the voice was the voice of the Comtesse.

Nothing very strange in the words you say, seeing that she spoke German, as well as several other languages, fluently. Perhaps not—but you know what my ideas used to be—how I was obsessed with the spy theory: at any rate, I listened. I listened for a quarter of an hour, and then I got my coat and went home—went home to try and see a way through just about the toughest proposition I'd ever been up against. For the Comtesse—Ginger Bathurst's idolised wife—was hand in glove with the German Secret Service. She was a spy, not of the wireless installation up the chimney type, not of the document-stealing type, but of a very much more dangerous type than either, the type it is almost impossible to incriminate.

I can't remember the conversation I overheard exactly, I cannot give it to you word for word, but I will give you the substance of it. Her companion was von Basel's chief—a typical Prussian officer of the most overbearing description.

"How goes it with you, Comtesse?" he asked her,

and I heard the scrape of a match as he lit a cigarette.

"Well, Baron, very well."

"They do not suspect?"

"Not an atom. The question has never been raised even as to my national sympathies, except once, and then the suggestion—not forced or emphasised in any way—that, as the child of a family who had lost everything in the '70 war, my sympathies were not hard to discover, was quite sufficient. That was at the time of the Agadir crisis."

"And you do not desire revanche?"

"My dear man, I desire money. My husband with his pay and private income has hardly enough to dress me on."

"But, dear lady, why, if I may ask, did you marry him? With so many others for her choice, surely the Comtesse de Grecin could have commanded the world?"

"Charming as a phrase, but I assure you that the idea of the world at one's feet is as extinct as the dodo. No, Baron, you may take it from me he was the best I could do. A rising junior soldier, employed on a staff job at the War Office, *persona grata* with all the people who really count in London by reason of his family, and moreover infatuated with his charming wife." Her companion gave a guttural chuckle; I could feel him leering. "I give the best dinners in

London; the majority of his senior officers think I am on the verge of running away with them, and when they become too obstreperous, I allow them to kiss my—fingers.

"Listen to me, Baron," she spoke rapidly, in a low voice so that I could hardly catch what she said. "I have already given information about some confidential big howitzer trials which I saw; it was largely on my reports that action was stopped at Agadir; and there are many other things—things intangible, in a certain sense—points of view, the state of feeling in Ireland, the conditions of labour, which I am able to hear the inner side of, in a way quite impossible if I had not the entrée into that particular class of English society which I now possess. Not the so-called smart set, you understand; but the real ruling set—the leading soldiers, the leading diplomats. Of course they are discreet——"

"But you are a woman and a peerless one, chère Comtesse. I think we may leave that cursed country in your hands with perfect safety. And, sooner perhaps than even we realise, we may see der Tag."

Such then was briefly the conversation I overheard. As I said, it is not given word for word—but that is immaterial. What was I to do? That was the point which drummed through my head as I walked back to my hotel; that was the point which was still drum-

ming through my head as the dawn came stealing in through my window. Put yourself in my place, old man; what would you have done?

I, alone, of everyone who knew her in London, had stumbled by accident on the truth. Bathurst idolised her, and she exaggerated no whit when she boasted that she had the entrée to the most exclusive circle in England. I know; I was one of it myself. And though one realises that it is only in plays and novels that Cabinet Ministers wander about whispering State secrets into the ears of beautiful adventuresses, yet one also knows in real life how devilish dangerous a really pretty and fascinating woman can be—especially when she's bent on finding things out and is clever enough to put two and two together.

Take one thing alone, and it was an aspect of the case that particularly struck me. Supposing diplomatic relations became strained between us and Germany—and I firmly believed, as you know, that sooner or later they would; supposing mobilisation was ordered—a secret one; suppose any of the hundred and one things which would be bound to form a prelude to a European war—and which at all costs must be kept secret—had occurred: think of the incalculable danger a clever woman in her position might have been, however discreet her husband was. And, my dear old boy, you know Ginger!

Supposing the Expeditionary Force were on the point of embarkation. A wife might guess their port of departure and arrival by an artless question or two as to where her husband on the Staff had motored to that day. But why go on? You see what I mean. Only to me, at that time—and now I might almost say that I am glad events have justified me—it appealed even more than it would have, say, to you. For I was so convinced of the danger that threatened us.

But what was I to do? It was only my word against hers. Tell Ginger? The idea made even me laugh. Tell the generals and the diplomatists? They didn't want to kiss *my* hand. Tell some big bug in the Secret Service? Yes—that anyway; but she was such a devilish clever woman, that I had but little faith in such a simple remedy, especially as most of them patronised her dinners themselves.

Still, that was the only thing to be done—that, and to keep a look-out myself, for I was tolerably certain she did not suspect me. Why should she?

And so in due course I found myself sitting next her at dinner as the *Astoria* started her journey across the water.

. . . . . .

I am coming to the climax of the drama, old man; I shall not bore you much longer. But before I actually give you the details of what occurred on that

ill-fated vessel's last trip, I want to make sure that you realise the state of mind I was in, and the action that I had decided on. Firstly, I was convinced that my dinner partner—the wife of one of my best friends —was an unscrupulous spy. That the evidence would not have hung a fly in a court of law was not the point; the evidence was my own hearing, which was good enough for me.

Secondly, I was convinced that she occupied a position in society which rendered it easy for her to get hold of the most invaluable information in the event of a war between us and Germany.

Thirdly, I was convinced that there would be a war between us and Germany.

So much for my state of mind; now, for my course of action.

I had decided to keep a watch on her, and, if I could get hold of the slightest incriminating evidence, expose her secretly, but mercilessly, to the Secret Service. If I could not—and if I realised there was danger brewing—to inform the Secret Service of what I had heard, and, sacrificing Ginger's friendship if necessary, and my own reputation for chivalry, swear away her honour, or anything, provided only her capacity for obtaining information temporarily ceased. Once that was done, then face the music, and be accused, if needs be, of false swearing, unrequited love, jealousy, what

you will. But to destroy her capacity for harm to my country was my bounden duty, whatever the social or personal results to me.

And there was one other thing—and on this one thing the whole course of the matter was destined to hang: *I alone could do it, for I alone knew the truth.* Let that sink in, old son; grasp it, realise it, and read my future actions by the light of that one simple fact.

I can see you sit back in your chair, and look into the fire with the light of comprehension dawning in your eyes; it does put the matter in a different complexion, doesn't it, my friend? You begin to appreciate the motives that impelled me to sacrifice a woman's life; so far so good. You are even magnanimous: what is one woman compared to the danger of a nation?

Dear old boy, I drink a silent toast to you. Have you no suspicions? What if the woman I sacrificed was the Comtesse herself? Does it surprise you; wasn't it the God-sent solution to everything?

Just as a freak of fate had acquainted me with her secret; so did a freak of fate throw me in her path at the end. . . .

We hit an iceberg, as you may remember, in the middle of the night, and the ship foundered in under twenty minutes.

You can imagine the scene of chaos after we struck,

or rather you can't. Men were running wildly about shouting, women were screaming, and the roar of the siren bellowing forth into the night drove people to a perfect frenzy. Then all the lights went out, and darkness settled down like a pall on the ship. I struggled up on deck, which was already tilting up at a perilous angle, and there—in the mass of scurrying figures—I came face to face with the Comtesse. In the panic of the moment I had forgotten all about her. She was quite calm, and smiled at me, for of course our relations were still as before.

Suddenly there came the shout from close at hand, "Room for one more only." What happened then, happened in a couple of seconds; it will take me longer to describe.

There flashed into my mind what would occur if I were drowned and the Comtesse was saved. There would be no one to combat her activities in England; she would have a free hand. My plans were null and void if I died; I must get back to England—or England would be in peril. I must pass on my information to someone—for I alone knew.

"Hurry up! one more." Another shout from near by, and looking round I saw that we were alone. It was she or I.

She moved towards the boat, and as she did so I saw the only possible solution—I saw what I then

thought to be my duty; what I still consider—and, God knows, that scene is never long out of my mind—what I still consider to have been my duty. I took her by the arm and twisted her facing me.

"As Ginger's wife, yes," I muttered; "as the cursed spy I know you to be, no—a thousand times no."

"My God!" she whispered. "My God!"

Without further thought I pushed by her and stepped into the boat, which was actually being lowered into the water. Two minutes later the *Astoria* sank, and she went down with her. . . .

That is what occurred that night in mid-Atlantic. I make no excuses, I offer no palliation; I merely state facts.

Only had I not heard what I did hear in that alcove she would have been just—Ginger's wife. Would the Expeditionary Force have crossed so successfully, I wonder?

As I say, I did what I still consider to have been my duty. If both could have been saved, well and good; but if it was only one, it *had* to be me, or neither. That's the rub; should it have been neither?

Many times since then, old friend, has the white twitching face of that woman haunted me in my dreams and in my waking hours. Many times since then have I thought that—spy or no spy—I had no right to save my life at her expense; I should have

gone down with her. Quixotical, perhaps, seeing she was what she was; but she was a woman. One thing and one thing only I can say. When you read these lines, I shall be dead; they will come to you as a voice from the dead. And, as a man who faces his Maker, I tell you, with a calm certainty that I am not deceiving myself, that that night there was no trace of cowardice in my mind. It was not a desire to save my own life that actuated me; it was the fear of danger to England. An error of judgment possibly; an act of cowardice—no. That much I state, and that much I demand that you believe.

. . . . . .

And now we come to the last chapter—the chapter that you know. I'd been back about two months when I first realised that there were stories going round about me. There were whispers in the club; men avoided me; women cut me. Then came the dreadful night when a man—half drunk—in the club accused me of cowardice point-blank, and sneeringly contrasted my previous reputation with my conduct on the *Astoria*. And I realised that someone must have seen. I knocked that swine in the club down; but the whispers grew. I knew it. Someone had seen, and it would be sheer hypocrisy on my part to pretend that such a thing didn't matter. It mattered everything: it ended me. The world—our world—judges deeds, not mo-

tives; and even had I published at the time this document I am sending to you, our world would have found me guilty. They would have said what you would have said had you spoken the thoughts I saw in your eyes that night I came to you. They would have said that a sudden wave of cowardice had overwhelmed me, and that brought face to face with death I had saved my own life at the expense of a woman's. Many would have gone still further, and said that my black cowardice was rendered blacker still by my hypocrisy in inventing such a story; that first to kill the woman, and then to blacken her reputation as an excuse, showed me as a thing unfit to live. I know the world.

Moreover, as far as I knew then—I am sure of it now—whoever it was who saw my action, did not see who the woman was, and therefore the publication of this document at that time would have involved Ginger, for it would have been futile to publish it without names. Feeling as I did that perhaps I should have sunk with her; feeling as I did that, for good or evil, I had blasted Ginger's life, I simply couldn't do it. You didn't believe in me, old chap; at the bottom of their hearts all my old pals thought I'd shown the yellow streak; and I couldn't stick it. So I went to the Colonel, and told him I was handing in my papers. He was in his quarters, I remember, and started filling his pipe as I was speaking.

"Why, Spud?" he asked, when I told him my intention.

And then I told him something of what I have written to you. I said it to him in confidence, and when I'd finished he sat very silent.

"Good God!" he muttered at length. "Ginger's wife!"

"You believe me, Colonel?" I asked.

"Spud," he said, putting his hands on my shoulders, "that's a damn rotten thing to ask me—after fifteen years. But it's the regiment." And he fell to staring at the fire.

Aye, that was it. It was the regiment that mattered. For better or for worse I had done what I had done, and it was my show. The Red Hussars must not be made to suffer; and their reputation would have suffered through me. Otherwise I'd have faced it out. As it was, I had to go; I knew it. I'd come to the same decision myself.

Only now, sitting here in camp with the setting sun glinting through the windows of the hut, just a Canadian private under an assumed name, things are a little different. The regiment is safe; I must think now of the old name. The Colonel was killed at Cambrai; therefore you alone will be in possession of the facts. Ginger, if he reads these words, will perhaps forgive me for the pain I have inflicted on him.

Let him remember that though I did a dreadful thing to him, a thing which up to now he has been ignorant of, yet I suffered much for his sake after. During my life it was one thing; when I am dead his claims must give way to a greater one—my name.

Wherefore I, Patrick Courtenay Trevor, having the unalterable intention of meeting my Maker during the present war, and therefore feeling in a measure that I am, even as I write, standing at the threshold of His Presence, do swear before Almighty God that what I have written is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me, God.

. . . . . .

The fall-in is going, old man. Good-bye.

CHAPTER IV

THE FATAL SECOND

IT was in July of 1914—on the Saturday of Henley Week. People who were there may remember that, for once in a way, our fickle climate was pleased to smile upon us.

Underneath the wall of Phyllis Court a punt was tied up. The prizes had been given away, and the tightly packed boats surged slowly up and down the river, freed at last from the extreme boredom of watching crews they did not know falling exhausted out of their boats. In the punt of which I speak were three men and a girl. One of the men was myself, who have no part in this episode, save the humble one of narrator. The other three were the principals; I would have you make their acquaintance. I would hurriedly say that it is not the old, old story of a woman and two men, for one of the men was her brother.

To begin with—the girl. Pat Delawnay—she was always called Pat, as she didn't look like a Patricia—was her name, and she was—well, here I give in. I don't know the colour of her eyes, nor can I say with

any certainty the colour of her hair; all I know is that she looked as if the sun had come from heaven and kissed her, and had then gone back again satisfied with his work. She was a girl whom to know was to love—the dearest, most understanding soul in God's whole earth. I'd loved her myself since I was out of petticoats.

Then there was Jack Delawnay, her brother. Two years younger he was, and between the two of them there was an affection and love which is frequently conspicuous by its absence between brother and sister. He was a cheery youngster, a good-looking boy, and fellows in the regiment liked him. He rode straight, and he had the money to keep good cattle. In addition, the men loved him, and that means a lot when you size up an officer.

And then there was the other. Older by ten years than the boy—the same age as myself—Jerry Dixon was my greatest friend. We had fought together at school, played the ass together at Sandhurst, and entered the regiment on the same day. He had "A" company and I had "C," and the boy was one of his subalterns. Perhaps I am biassed, but to me Jerry Dixon had one of the finest characters I have ever seen in any man. He was no Galahad, no prig; he was just a man, a white man. He had that cheerily ugly face which is one of the greatest gifts a man

can have, and he also had Pat as his fiancée, which was another.

My name is immaterial, but everyone calls me Winkle, owing to—— Well, some day I may tell you.

The regiment, our regiment, was the, let us call it the Downshires.

We had come over from Aldershot and were week-ending at the Delawnays' place—they always took one on the river for Henley. At the moment Jerry was holding forth, quite unmoved by exhortations to "Get out and get under" bawled in his ears by blackened gentlemen of doubtful voice and undoubted inebriation.

As I write, the peculiar—the almost sinister—nature of his conversation, in the light of future events, seems nothing short of diabolical. And yet at the time we were just three white-flannelled men and a girl with a great floppy hat lazing over tea in a punt. How the gods must have laughed!

"My dear old Winkle"—he was lighting a cigarette as he spoke—"you don't realise the deeper side of soldiering at all. The subtle nuances (French, Pat, in case my accent is faulty) are completely lost upon you."

I remember smiling to myself as I heard Jerry getting warmed up to his subject, and then my attention wandered, and I dozed off. I had heard it all

before so often from the dear old boy. We always used to chaff him about it in the mess. I can see him now, after dinner, standing with his back to the ante-room fire, a whisky-and-soda in his hand and a dirty old pipe between his teeth.

"It's all very well for you fellows to laugh," he would say, "but I'm right for all that. It is absolutely essential to think out beforehand what one would do in certain exceptional eventualities, so that when that eventuality does arise you won't waste any time, but will automatically do the right thing."

And then the adjutant recalled in a still small voice how he first realised the orderly-room sergeant's baby was going to be sick in his arms at the regiment's Christmas-tree festivities, and, instead of throwing it on the floor, he had clung to it for that fatal second of indecision. As he admitted, it was certainly not one of the things he had thought out beforehand.

He's gone, too, has old Bellairs the adjutant. I wonder how many fellows I'll know when I get back to them next week? But I'm wandering.

"Winkle, wake up!" It was Pat speaking. "Jerry is being horribly serious, and I'm not at all certain it will be safe to marry him; he'll be experimenting on me."

"What's he been saying?" I murmured sleepily.

"He's been thinking what he'd do," laughed Jack,

"if the stout female personage in yonder small canoe overbalanced and fell in. There'll be no fatal second then, Jerry, my boy. It'll be a minute even if I have to hold you. You'd never be able to look your friends in the face again if you didn't let her drown."

"Ass!" grunted Jerry. "No, Winkle, I was just thinking, amongst other things, of what might very easily happen to any of us three here, and what did happen to old Grantley in South Africa." Grantley was one of our majors. "He told me all about it one day in one of his expansive moods. It was during a bit of a scrap just before Paardeburg, and he had some crowd of irregular Johnnies. He was told off to take a position, and apparently it was a fairly warm proposition. However, it was perfectly feasible if only the men stuck it. Well, they didn't, but they would have except for his momentary indecision. He told me that there came a moment in the advance when one man wavered. He knew it and felt it all through him. He saw the man—he almost saw the deadly contagion spreading from that one man to the others—and he hesitated and was lost. When he sprang forward and tried to hold 'em, he failed. The fear was on them, and they broke. He told me he regarded himself as every bit as much to blame as the man who first gave out."

"But what could he have done, Jerry?" asked Pat.

"Shot him, dear—shot him on the spot without a second's thought—killed the origin of the fear before it had time to spread. I venture to say that there are not many fellows in the Service who would do it —without thinking: and you can't think—you dare not, even if there was time. It goes against the grain, especially if you know the man well, and it's only by continually rehearsing the scene in your mind that you'd be able to do it."

We were all listening to him now, for this was a new development I'd never heard before.

"Just imagine the far-reaching results one coward —no, not coward, possibly—but one man who has reached the breaking-point, may have. Think of it, Winkle. A long line stretched out, attacking. One man in the centre wavers, stops. Spreading outwards, the thing rushes like lightning, because, after all, fear is only an emotion, like joy and sorrow, and one knows how quickly they will communicate themselves to other people. Also, in such a moment as an attack, men are particularly susceptible to emotions. All that is primitive is uppermost, and their reasoning powers are more or less in abeyance."

"But the awful thing, Jerry," said Pat quietly, "is that you would never know whether it had been necessary or not. It might not have spread; he might have

answered to your voice—oh! a thousand things might have happened."

"It's not worth the risk, dear. One man's life is not worth the risk. It's a risk you just dare not take. It may mean everything—it may mean failure—it may mean disgrace." He paused and looked steadily across the shifting scene of gaiety and colour, while a long bamboo pole with a little bag on the end, wielded by some passing vocalist, was thrust towards him unheeded. Then with a short laugh he pulled himself together, and lit a cigarette. "But enough of dull care. Let us away, and gaze upon beautiful women and brave men. What's that little tune they're playing?"

"That's that waltz—what the deuce is the name, Pat?" asked Jack, untying the punt.

"'Destiny,'" answered Pat briefly, and we passed out into the stream.

. . . . .

A month afterwards we three were again at Henley, not in flannels in a punt on the river, but in khaki, with a motor waiting at the door of the Delawnays' house to take us back to Aldershot. I do not propose to dwell over the scene, but in the setting down of the story it cannot be left out. Europe was at war; the long-expected by those scoffed-at alarmists had actually come. England and Germany were at each other's throats.

Inside the house Jack was with his mother. Personally, I was standing in the garden with the grey-haired father; and Jerry was—well, where else could he have been?

As is the way with men, we discussed the roses, and the rascality of the Germans, and everything except what was in our hearts. And in one of the pauses in our spasmodic conversation we heard her voice, just over the hedge:

"God guard and keep you, my man, and bring you back to me safe!" And the voice was steady, though one could feel those dear eyes dim with tears.

And then Jerry's, dear old Jerry's voice—a little bit gruff it was, and a little bit shaky: "My love! My darling!"

But the old man was going towards the house, blowing his nose; and I—don't hold with love and that sort of thing at all. True, I blundered into a flower-bed, which I didn't see clearly, as I went towards the car, for there are things which one may not hear and remain unmoved. Perhaps, if things had been different, and Jerry—dear old Jerry—hadn't—— But there, I'm wandering again.

At last we were in the car and ready to start.

"Take care of him, Jerry; he and Pat are all we've got." It was Mrs. Delawnay speaking, standing there

with the setting sun on her sweet face and her husband's arm about her.

"I'll be all right, mater," answered Jack gruffly. "Buck up! Back for Christmas!"

"I'll look after him, Mrs. Delawnay," answered Jerry, but his eyes were fixed on Pat, and for him the world held only her.

As the car swung out of the gate, we looked back the last time and saluted, and it was only I who saw through a break in the hedge two women locked in each other's arms, while a grey-haired gentleman sat very still on a garden-seat, with his eyes fixed on the river rolling smoothly by.

. . . . .

It was on the Aisne I took it. Through that ghastly fourteen days we had slogged dully south away from Mons, ever getting nearer Paris. Through the choking dust, with the men staggering as they walked—some asleep, some babbling, some cursing—but always marching, marching, marching; digging at night, only to leave the trenches in two hours and march on again; with ever and anon a battery of horse tearing past at a gallop, with the drivers lolling drunkenly in their saddles, and the guns jolting and swaying behind the straining, sweating horses, to come into action on some ridge still further south, and try to check von Kluck's hordes, if only for a little space. Every bridge in the

hands of anxious-faced sapper officers, prepared for demolition one and all, but not to be blown up till all our troops were across. Ticklish work, for should there be a fault, there is not much time to repair it.

But at last it was over, and we turned North. A few days later, in the afternoon, my company crossed a pontoon bridge on the Aisne, and two hours afterwards we dug ourselves in a mile and a half beyond it. The next morning, as I was sitting in one of the trenches, there was a sudden, blinding roar—and oblivion.

. . . . .

I will pass rapidly over the next six weeks—over my journey from the clearing hospital to the base at Havre, of my voyage back to England in a hospital ship, and my ultimate arrival at Drayton Hall, the Delawnays' place in Somerset, where I had gone to convalesce.

During the time various fragments of iron were being picked from me and the first shock of the concussion was wearing off, we had handed over our trenches on the Aisne to the French, and moved north to Flanders.

Occasional scrawls came through from Jack and Jerry, but the people in England who had any knowledge at all of the fighting and of what was going on, grew to dread with an awful dread the sight of the

telegraph-boy, and it required an effort of will to look at those prosaic casualty lists in the morning papers.

Then suddenly without warning, as such news always does, it came. The War Office, in the shape of a whistling telegraph-boy, regretted to inform Mr. Delawnay that his son, Lieutenant Jack Delawnay of the Royal Downshire Regiment, had been killed in action.

Had it been possible during the terrible days after the news came, I would have gone away, but I was still too weak to move; and I like to think that, perhaps, my presence there was some comfort to them, as a sort of connection through the regiment with their dead boy. After the first numbing shock, the old man bore it grandly.

"He was all I had," he said to me one day as I lay in bed, "but I give him gladly for his country's sake." He stood looking at the broad fields. "All his," he muttered; "all would have been the dear lad's —and now six inches of soil and a wooden cross, perhaps not that."

And Pat, poor little Pat, used to come up every day and sit with me, sometimes in silence, with her great eyes fixed on the fire, sometimes reading the paper, because my eyes weren't quite right yet.

For about a fortnight after the news we did not

think it strange; but then, as day by day went by, the same fear formulated in both our minds. I would have died sooner than whisper it; but one afternoon I found her eyes fixed on mine. We had been silent for some time, and suddenly in the firelight I saw the awful fear in her mind as clearly as if she had spoken it.

"You're thinking it too, Winkle," she whispered, leaning forward. "Why hasn't he written? Why hasn't Jerry written one line? Oh, my God! don't say that *he* has been——"

"Hush, dear!" I said quietly. "His people would have let you know if they had had a wire."

"But, Winkle, the Colonel has written that Jack died while gallantly leading a counter attack to recover lost trenches. Surely, Jerry would have found time for a line, unless something had happened to him; Jack was actually in his company."

All of which I knew, but could not answer.

"Besides," she went on after a moment, "you know how dad is longing for details. He wants to know everything about Jack, and so do we all. But oh, Winkle! I want to know if my man is all right. Brother and lover—not both, oh, God—not both!" The choking little sobs wrung my heart.

The next day we got a wire from him. He was wounded slightly in the arm, and was at home. He

was coming to us. Just that—no more. But, oh! the difference to the girl. Everything explained, everything clear, and the next day Jerry would be with her. Only as I lay awake that night thinking, and the events of the last three weeks passed through my mind, the same thought returned with maddening persistency. Slightly wounded in the arm, evidently recently as there was no mention in the casualty list, and for three weeks no line, no word. And then I cursed myself as an ass and a querulous invalid.

At three o'clock he arrived, and they all came up to my room. The first thing that struck me like a blow was that it was his left arm which was hit—and the next was his face. Whether Pat had noticed that his writing arm was unhurt, I know not; but she had seen the look in his eyes, and was afraid.

Then he told the story, and his voice was as the voice of the dead. Told the anxious, eager father and mother the story of their boy's heroism. How, having lost some trenches, the regiment made a counter attack to regain them. How first of them all was Jack, the men following him, as they always did, until a shot took him clean through the heart, and he dropped, leaving the regiment to surge over him for the last forty yards, and carry out gloriously what they had been going to do.

And then the old man, pulling out the letter from

the Colonel, and trying to read it through his blinding tears: "He did well, my boy," he whispered, "he did well, and died well. But, Jerry, the Colonel says in his letter," and he wiped his eyes and tried to read, "he says in his letter that Jack must have been right into their trenches almost, as he was killed at point-blank range with a revolver. One of those swine of German officers, I suppose." He shook his fist in the air. "Still he was but doing his duty. I must not complain. But you say he was forty yards away?"

"It's difficult to say, sir, in the dark," answered Jerry, still in the voice of an automatic machine. "It may have been less than forty."

And then he told them all over again; and while they, the two old dears, whispered and cried together, never noticing anything amiss, being only concerned with the telling, and caring no whit for the method thereof, Pat sat silently in the window, gazing at him with tearless eyes, with the wonder and amazement of her soul writ clear on her face for all to see. And I—I lay motionless in bed, and there was something I could not understand, for he would not look at me, nor yet at her, but kept his eyes fixed on the fire, while he talked like a child repeating a lesson.

At last it was over; their last questions were asked, and slowly, arm-in-arm, they left the room, to dwell

alone upon the story of their idolised boy. And in the room the silence was only broken by the crackling of the logs.

How long we sat there I know not, with the firelight flickering on the stern set face of the man in the chair. He seemed unconscious of our existence, and we two dared not speak to him, we who loved him best, for there was something we could not understand. Suddenly he got up, and held out his arms to Pat. And when she crept into them, he kissed her, straining her close, as if he could never stop. Then, without a word, he led her to the door, and, putting her gently through, shut it behind her. Still without a word he came back to the chair, and turned it so that the firelight no longer played on his face. And then he spoke.

"I have a story to tell you, Winkle, which I venture to think will entertain you for a time." His voice was the most terrible thing I have ever listened to. . . . "Nearly four weeks ago the battalion was in the trenches a bit south of Ypres. It was bad in the retreat, as you know; it was bad on the Aisne; but they were neither of them in the same county as the doing we had up north. One night—they'd shelled us off and on for three days and three nights—we were driven out of our trenches. The regiment on our right gave, and we had to go too. The next morning we

were ordered to counter attack, and get back the ground we had lost. It was the attack in which we lost so heavily."

He stopped speaking for a while, and I did not interrupt.

"When I got that order overnight Jack was with me, in a hole that passed as a dugout. At the moment everything was quiet; the Germans were patching up their new position; only a maxim spluttered away a bit to one flank. To add to the general desolation a steady downpour of rain drenched us, into which without cessation the German flares went shooting up. I think they were expecting a counter attack at once. . . ."

Again he paused, and I waited.

"You know the condition one gets into sometimes when one is heavy for sleep. We had it during the retreat if you remember—a sort of coma, the outcome of utter bodily exhaustion. One used to go on walking, and all the while one was asleep—or practically so. Sounds came to us dimly as from a great distance; they made no impression on us—they were just a jumbled phantasmagoria of outside matters, which failed to reach one's brain, except as a dim dream. I was in that condition on the night I am speaking of; I was utterly cooked—beat to the world; I was finished for the time. I've told you this, because I want you to understand the physical condition I was in."

He leaned forward and stared at the fire, resting his head on his hands.

"How long I'd dozed heavily in that wet-sodden hole I don't know, but after a while above the crackle of the maxim, separate and distinct from the soft splash of the rain, and the hiss of the flares, and the hundred and one other noises that came dimly to me out of the night, I heard Jack's voice—at least I think it was Jack's voice."

Of a sudden he sat up in the chair, and rising quickly he came and leant over the foot of the bed.

"Devil take it," he cried bitterly, "I know it was Jack's voice—*now*. I knew it the next day when it was too late. What he said exactly I shall never know—at the time it made no impression on me; but at this moment, almost like a spirit voice in my brain, I can hear him. I can hear him asking me to watch him. I can hear him pleading—I can hear his dreadful fear of being found afraid. As a whisper from a great distance I can hear one short sentence—'Jerry, my God, Jerry—I'm frightened!'

"Winkle, he turned to me in his weakness—that boy who had never failed before, that boy who had reached the breaking-point—and I heeded him not. I was too dead beat; my brain couldn't grasp it."

"But, Jerry," I cried, "it turned out all right the

next day; he . . ." The words died away on my lips as I met the look in his eyes.

"You'd better let me finish," he interrupted wearily. "Let me get the whole hideous tragedy off my mind for the first and the last time. Early next morning we attacked. In the dim dirty light of dawn I saw the boy's face as he moved off to his platoon; and even then I didn't remember those halting sentences that had come to me out of the night. So instead of ordering him to the rear on some pretext or other as I should have done, I let him go to his platoon.

"As we went across the ground that morning through a fire like nothing I had ever imagined, a man wavered in front of me. I felt it clean through me. I knew fear had come. I shouted and cheered—but the wavering was spreading; I knew that too. So I shot him through the heart from behind at point-blank range as I had trained myself to do—in that eternity ago—before the war. The counter attack was successful."

"Great Heavens, Jerry!" I muttered, "who did you shoot?" though I knew the answer already.

"The man I shot was Jack Delawnay. Whether at the time I was actively conscious of it, I cannot say. Certainly my training enabled me to act before any glimmering of the aftermath came into my mind. *This* is the aftermath."

I shuddered at the utter hopelessness of his tone, though the full result of his action had not dawned on me yet; my mind was dazed.

"But surely Jack was no coward," I said at length.

"He was not; but on that particular morning he gave out. He had reached the limit of his endurance."

"The Colonel's letter," I reminded him; "it praised the lad."

"Lies," he answered wearily, "all lies, engineered by me. Not because I am ashamed of what I did, but for the lad's sake, and hers, and the old people. I loved the boy, as you know, but he failed, and *there was no other way.* And where the fiend himself is gloating over it is that he knows it was the only time Jack did fail. If only I hadn't been so beat the night before; if only his words had reached my brain before it was too late. If only . . . I think," he added, after a pause, "I think I shall go mad. Sometimes I wish I could."

"And what of Pat?" I asked, at length breaking the silence.

The hands grasping the bed tightened, and grew white.

"I said 'Good-bye' to her before your eyes, ten minutes ago. I shall never see her again."

"But, Great Heavens, Jerry!" I cried, "you can't give her up like that. She idolises the ground you

walk on, she worships you, and she need never know. You were only doing your duty after all."

"Stop!" he cried, and his voice was a command. "As you love me, old friend, don't tempt me. For three weeks those arguments have been flooding everything else from my mind. Do you remember at Henley, when she said, 'He might have answered to your voice?' Winkle, it's true, Jack might have. And I killed him. Just think if I married her, and she did find out. Her brother's murderer—in her eyes. The man who has wrecked her home, and broken her father and mother. It's inconceivable, it's hideous. Ah! don't you see how utterly final it all is? She may have been right; and if she was, then I, who loved her better than the world, have murdered her brother, and broken the old people's hearts for the sake of a theory. The fact that my theory has been put into practice, at the expense of everything I have to live for, is full of humour, isn't it?" And his laugh was wild.

"Steady, Jerry," I said sternly. "What do you mean to do?"

"You'll see, old man, in time," he answered. "First and foremost, get back to the regiment, arm or no arm. I would not have come home, but I had to see her once more."

"You talk as if it was the end." I looked at him squarely.

"It is," he answered. "It's easy out there."

"Your mind is made up?"

"Absolutely." He gave a short laugh. "Good-bye, old friend. Ease it to her as well as you can. Say I'm unstrung by the trenches, anything you like; but don't let her guess the truth."

For a long minute he held my hand. Then he turned away. He walked to the mantelpiece, and there was a photograph of her there. For a long time he looked at it, and it seemed to me he whispered something. A sudden dimness blinded my eyes, and when I looked again he had gone—through the window into the night.

. . . . .

I did not see Pat until I left Drayton Hall after that ghastly night, save only once or twice with her mother in the room.

But an hour before I left she came to me, and her face was that of a woman who has passed through the fires.

"Tell me, Winkle, shall I ever see him again? You know what I mean."

"You will never see him again, Pat," and the look in her eyes made me choke.

"Will you tell me what it was he told you before he went through the window? You see, I was in the hall waiting for him," and she smiled wearily.

"I can't, Pat dear; I promised him," I muttered. "But it was nothing disgraceful."

"Disgraceful!" she cried proudly. "Jerry, and anything disgraceful. Oh, my God! Winkle dear," and she broke down utterly, "do you remember the waltz they were playing that day—'Destiny'?"

And then I went. Whether that wonderful woman's intuition has told her something of what happened, I know not. But yesterday morning I got a letter from the Colonel saying that Jerry had chucked his life away, saving a wounded man. And this morning she will have seen it in the papers.

God help you, Pat, my dear.

CHAPTER V

JIM BRENT'S V.C.

IF you pass through the Menin-Gate at Ypres, and walk up the slight rise that lies on the other side of the moat, you will come to the parting of the ways. You will at the same time come to a spot of unprepossessing aspect, whose chief claim to notoriety lies in its shell-holes and broken-down houses. If you keep straight on you will in time come to the little village of Potige; if you turn to the right you will eventually arrive at Hooge. In either case you will wish you hadn't.

Before the war these two roads—which join about two hundred yards east of the rampart walls of Ypres —were adorned with a fair number of houses. They were of that stucco type which one frequently sees in England spreading out along the roads that lead to a largish town. Generally there is one of unusually revolting aspect that stands proudly by itself a hundred yards or so from the common herd and enclosed in a stuccoesque wall. And there my knowledge of the type in England ends.

In Belgium, however, my acquaintance with this sort of abode is extensive. In taking over a house in Flanders that stands unpleasantly near the Hun, the advertisement that there are three sitting, two bed, h. and c. laid on, with excellent onion patch, near railway and good golf-links, leaves one cold. The end-all and be-all of a house is its cellar. The more gloomy, and dark, and generally horrible the cellar, the higher that house ranks socially, and the more likely are you to find in it a general consuming his last hamper from Fortnum & Mason by the light of a tallow dip. And this applies more especially to the Hooge road.

Arrived at the fork, let us turn right-handed and proceed along the deserted road. A motor-car is not to be advised, as at this stage of the promenade one is in full sight of the German trenches. For about two or three hundred yards no houses screen you, and then comes a row of the stucco residences I have mentioned. Also at this point the road bends to the left. Here, out of sight, occasional men sun themselves in the heavily-scented air, what time they exchange a little playful badinage in a way common to Thomas Atkins. At least, that is what happened some time ago; now, of course, things may have changed in the garden city.

And at this point really our journey is ended,

though for interest we might continue for another quarter of a mile. The row of houses stops abruptly, and away in front stretches a long straight road. A few detached mansions of sorts, in their own grounds, flank it on each side. At length they cease, and in front lies the open country. The poplar-lined road disappears out of sight a mile ahead, where it tops a gentle slope. And half on this side of the rise, and half on the other, there are the remnants of the tit-bit of the whole bloody charnel-house of the Ypres salient —the remnants of the village of Hooge. A closer examination is not to be recommended. The place where you stand is known in the vernacular as Hell Fire Corner, and the Hun—who knows the range of that corner to the fraction of an inch—will quite possibly resent your presence even there. And shrapnel gives a nasty wound.

Let us return and seek safety in a cellar. It is not what one would call a good-looking cellar; no priceless prints adorn the walls, no Turkey carpet receives your jaded feet. In one corner a portable gramophone with several records much the worse for wear reposes on an upturned biscuit-box, and lying on the floor, with due regard to space economy, are three or four of those excellent box-mattresses which form the all-in-all of the average small Belgian house. On top of them are laid some valises and blankets, and from the one in

the corner the sweet music of the sleeper strikes softly on the ear. It is the senior subaltern, who has been rambling all the preceding night in Sanctuary Wood—the proud authors of our nomenclature in Flanders quite rightly possess the humour necessary for the production of official communiqués.

In two chairs, smoking, are a couple of officers. One is a major of the Royal Engineers, and another, also a sapper, belongs to the gilded staff. The cellar is the temporary headquarters of a field company—office, mess, and bedroom rolled into one.

"I'm devilish short-handed for the moment, Bill." The Major thoughtfully filled his pipe. "That last boy I got a week ago—a nice boy he was, too—was killed in Zouave Wood the day before yesterday, poor devil. Seymour was wounded three days ago, and there's only Brent, Johnson, and him"—he indicated the sleeper. "Johnson is useless, and Brent——" He paused, and looked full at the Staff-captain. "Do you know Brent well, by any chance?"

"I should jolly well think I did. Jim Brent is one of my greatest pals, Major."

"Then perhaps you can tell me something I very much want to know. I have knocked about the place for a good many years, and I have rubbed shoulders, officially and unofficially, with more men than I care to remember. As a result, I think I may claim a

fair knowledge of my fellow-beings. And Brent—well, he rather beats me."

He paused as if at a loss for words, and looked in the direction of the sleeping subaltern. Reassured by the alarming noise proceeding from the corner, he seemed to make up his mind.

"Has Brent had some very nasty knock lately—money, or a woman, or something?"

The Staff-captain took his pipe from his mouth, and for some seconds stared at the floor. Then he asked quietly, "Why? What are you getting at?"

"This is why, Bill. Brent is one of the most capable officers I have ever had. He's a man whose judgment, tact, and driving power are perfectly invaluable in a show of this sort—so invaluable, in fact"—he looked straight at his listener—"that his death would be a very real loss to the corps and the Service. He's one of those we can't replace, and—he's going all out to make us have to."

"What do you mean?" The question expressed no surprise; the speaker seemed merely to be demanding confirmation of what he already knew.

"Brent is deliberately trying to get killed. There is not a shadow of doubt about it in my mind. Do you know why?"

The Staff-officer got up and strolled to a table on which were lying some illustrated weekly papers.

"Have you last week's *Tatler*?" He turned over the leaves. "Yes—here it is." He handed the newspaper to the Major. "That is why."

"A charming portrait of Lady Kathleen Goring, who was last week married to that well-known sportsman and soldier Sir Richard Goring. She was, it will be remembered, very popular in London society as the beautiful Miss Kathleen Tubbs—the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Silas P. Tubbs, of Pittsburg, Pa."

The Major put down the paper and looked at the Staff-captain; then suddenly he rose and hurled it into the corner. "Oh, damn these women," he exploded.

"Amen," murmured the other, as, with a loud snort, the sleeper awoke.

"Is anything th' matter?" he murmured, drowsily, only to relapse at once into unconsciousness.

"Jim was practically engaged to her; and then, three months ago, without a word of explanation, she gave him the order of the boot, and got engaged to Goring." The Staff-captain spoke savagely. "A damn rotten woman, Major, and Jim's well out of it, if he only knew. Goring's a baronet, which is, of course, the reason why this excrescence of the house of Tubbs chucked Jim. As a matter of fact, Dick Goring's not a bad fellow—he deserves a better fate. But it fairly broke Jim up. He's not the sort of fellow who falls in love easily; this was his one and

only real affair, and he took it bad. He told me at the time that he never intended to come back alive."

"Damn it all!" The Major's voice was irritable. "Why, his knowledge of the lingo alone makes him invaluable."

"Frankly, I've been expecting to hear of his death every day. He's not the type that says a thing of that sort without meaning it."

A step sounded on the floor above. "Look out, here he is. You'll stop and have a bit of lunch, Bill?"

As he spoke the light in the doorway was blocked out, and a man came uncertainly down the stairs.

"Confound these cellars. One can't see a thing, coming in out of the daylight. Who's that? Halloa, Bill, old cock, 'ow's yourself?"

"Just tottering, Jim. Where've you been?"

"Wandered down to Vlamertinghe this morning early to see about some sandbags, and while I was there I met that flying wallah Petersen in the R.N.A.S. Do you remember him, Major? He was up here with an armoured car in May. He told me rather an interesting thing."

"What's that, Jim?" The Major was attacking a brawn with gusto. "Sit down, Bill. Whisky and Perrier in that box over there."

"He tells me the Huns have got six guns whose size he puts at about 9-inch; guns, mark you, not howit-

zers—mounted on railway trucks at Tournai. From there they can be rushed by either branch of the line—the junction is just west—to wherever they are required."

"My dear old boy," laughed Bill, as he sat down. "I don't know your friend Petersen, and I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that he is in all probability quite right. But the information seems to be about as much use as the fact that it is cold in Labrador."

"I wonder," answered Brent, thoughtfully—"I wonder." He was rummaging through a pile of papers in the stationery box.

The other two men looked at one another significantly. "What hare-brained scheme have you got in your mind now, Brent?" asked the Major.

Brent came slowly across the cellar and sat down with a sheet of paper spread out on his knee. For a while he examined it in silence, comparing it with an ordnance map, and then he spoke. "It's brick, and the drop is sixty feet, according to this—with the depth of the water fifteen."

"And the answer is a lemon. What on earth are you talking about, Jim?"

"The railway bridge over the river before the line forks."

"Good Lord! My good fellow," cried the Major,

irritably, "don't be absurd. Are you proposing to blow it up?" His tone was ponderously sarcastic.

"Not exactly," answered the unperturbed Brent, "but something of the sort—if I can get permission."

The two men laid down their knives and stared at him solemnly.

"You are, I believe, a sapper officer," commenced the Major. "May I ask first how much gun-cotton you think will be necessary to blow up a railway bridge which gives a sixty-foot drop into water; second, how you propose to get it there; third, how you propose to get yourself there; and fourth, why do you talk such rot?"

Jim Brent laughed and helped himself to whisky. "The answer to the first question is unknown at present, but inquiries of my secretary will be welcomed—probably about a thousand pounds. The answer to the second question is that I don't. The answer to the third is—somehow; and for the fourth question I must ask for notice."

"What the devil are you driving at, Jim?" said the Staff-captain, puzzled. "If you don't get the stuff there, how the deuce are you going to blow up the bridge?"

"You may take it from me, Bill, that I may be mad, but I never anticipated marching through German

Belgium with a party of sappers and a G.S. wagon full of gun-cotton. Oh, no—it's a one-man show."

"But," ejaculated the Major, "how the——"

"Have you ever thought, sir," interrupted Brent, "what would be the result if, as a heavy train was passing over a bridge, you cut one rail just in front of the engine?"

"But——" the Major again started to speak, and was again cut short.

"The outside rail," continued Brent, "so that the tendency would be for the engine to go towards the parapet wall. And no iron girder to hold it up—merely a little brick wall"—he again referred to the paper on his knee—"three feet high and three bricks thick. No nasty parties of men carrying slabs of gun-cotton; just yourself—with one slab of gun-cotton in your pocket and one primer and one detonator—that and the psychological moment. Luck, of course, but when we dispense with the working party we lift it from the utterly impossible into the realm of the remotely possible. The odds are against success, I know; but——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"But how do you propose to get there, my dear chap?" asked the Major, peevishly. "The Germans have a rooted objection to English officers walking about behind their lines."

"Yes, but they don't mind a Belgian peasant, do

they? Dash it, they've played the game on us scores of times, Major—not perhaps the bridge idea, but espionage by men disguised behind our lines. I only propose doing the same, and perhaps going one better."

"You haven't one chance in a hundred of getting through alive." The Major viciously stabbed a tongue.

"That is—er—beside the point," answered Brent, shortly.

"But how could you get through their lines to start with?" queried Bill.

"There are ways, dearie, there are ways. Petersen is a man of much resource."

"Of course, the whole idea is absolutely ridiculous." The Major snorted. "Once and for all, Brent, I won't hear of it. We're far too short of fellows as it is."

And for a space the subject languished, though there was a look on Jim Brent's face which showed it was only for a space.

Now when a man of the type of Brent takes it badly over a woman, there is a strong probability of very considerable trouble at any time. When, in addition to that, it occurs in the middle of the bloodiest war of history, the probability becomes a certainty. That he should quite fail to see just what manner of woman

the present Lady Goring was, was merely in the nature of the animal. He was—as far as women were concerned—of the genus fool. To him "the rag, and the bone, and the hank of hair" could never be anything but perfect. It is as well that there are men like that.

All of which his major—who was a man of no little understanding—knew quite well. And the knowledge increased his irritation, for he realised the futility of trying to adjust things. That adjusting business is ticklish work even between two close pals; but when the would-be adjuster is very little more than a mere acquaintance, the chances of success might be put in a small-sized pill-box. To feel morally certain that your best officer is trying his hardest to get himself killed, and to be unable to prevent it, is an annoying state of affairs. Small wonder, then, that at intervals throughout the days that followed did the Major reiterate with solemnity and emphasis his remark to the Staff-captain anent women. It eased his feelings, if it did nothing else.

The wild scheme Brent had half suggested did not trouble him greatly. He regarded it merely as a temporary aberration of the brain. In the South African war small parties of mounted sappers and cavalry had undoubtedly ridden far into hostile country, and, getting behind the enemy, had blown up bridges, and generally damaged their lines of communication. But

in the South African war a line of trenches did not stretch from sea to sea.

And so, seated one evening at the door of his commodious residence talking things over with his colonel, he did not lay any great stress on the bridge idea. Brent had not referred to it again; and in the cold light of reason it seemed too foolish to mention.

"Of course," remarked the C.R.E., "he's bound to take it soon. No man can go on running the fool risks you say he does without stopping one. It's a pity; but, if he won't see by himself that he's a fool, I don't see what we can do to make it clear. If only that confounded girl——" He grunted and got up to go. "Halloa! What the devil is this fellow doing?"

Shambling down the road towards them was a particularly decrepit and filthy specimen of the Belgian labourer. In normal circumstances, and in any other place, his appearance would have called for no especial comment; the brand is not a rare one. But for many months the salient of Ypres had been cleared of its civilian population; and this sudden appearance was not likely to pass unnoticed.

"Venez, ici, monsieur, tout de suite." At the Major's words the old man stopped, and paused in hesitation; then he shuffled towards the two men.

"Will you talk to him, Colonel?" The Major glanced at his senior officer.

"Er—I think not; my—er—French, don't you know—er—not what it was." The worthy officer retired in good order, only to be overwhelmed by a perfect deluge of words from the Belgian.

"What's he say?" he queried, peevishly. "That damn Flemish sounds like a dog fight."

"Parlez-vous Français, monsieur?" The Major attempted to stem the tide of the old man's verbosity, but he evidently had a grievance, and a Belgian with a grievance is not a thing to be regarded with a light heart.

"Thank heavens, here's the interpreter!" The Colonel heaved a sigh of relief. "Ask this man what he's doing here, please."

For a space the distant rattle of a machine-gun was drowned, and then the interpreter turned to the officers.

" 'E say, sare, that 'e has ten thousand franc behind the German line, buried in a 'ole, and 'e wants to know vat 'e shall do."

"Do," laughed the Major. "What does he imagine he's likely to do? Go and dig it up? Tell him that he's got no business here at all."

Again the interpreter spoke.

"Shall I take 'im to Yper and 'and 'im to the gendarmes, sare?"

"Not a bad idea," said the Colonel, "and have him——"

What further order he was going to give is immaterial, for at that moment he looked at the Belgian, and from that villainous old ruffian he received the most obvious and unmistakable wink.

"Er—thank you, interpreter; I will send him later under a guard."

The interpreter saluted and retired, the Major looked surprised, the Colonel regarded the Belgian with an amazed frown. Then suddenly the old villain spoke.

"Thank you, Colonel. Those Ypres gendarmes would have been a nuisance."

"Great Scot!" gasped the Major. "What the——"

"What the devil is the meaning of this masquerade, sir?" The Colonel was distinctly angry.

"I wanted to see if I'd pass muster as a Belgian, sir. The interpreter was an invaluable proof."

"You run a deuced good chance of being shot, Brent, in that rig. Anyway, I wish for an explanation as to why you're walking about in that get-up. Haven't you enough work to do?"

"Shall we go inside, sir? I've got a favour to ask you."

We are not very much concerned with the conversation that took place downstairs in that same cellar,

when two senior officers of the corps of Royal Engineers listened for nearly an hour to an apparently disreputable old farmer. It might have been interesting to note how the sceptical grunts of those two officers gradually gave place to silence, and at length to a profound, breathless interest, as they pored over maps and plans. And the maps were all of that country which lies behind the German trenches.

But at the end the old farmer straightened himself smartly.

"That is the rough outline of my plan, sir. I think I can claim that I have reduced the risk of not getting to my objective to a minimum. When I get there I am sure that my knowledge of the patois renders the chance of detection small. As for the actual demolition itself, an enormous amount will depend on luck; but I can afford to wait. I shall have to be guided by local conditions. And so I ask you to let me go. It's a long odds chance, but if it comes off it's worth it."

"And if it does, what then? What about you?" The Colonel's eyes and Jim Brent's met.

"I shall have paid for my keep, Colonel, at any rate."

Everything was very silent in the cellar; outside on the road a man was singing.

"In other words, Jim, you're asking me to allow you to commit suicide."

He cleared his throat; his voice seemed a little husky.

"Good Lord! sir—it's not as bad as that. Call it a forlorn hope, if you like, but . . ." The eyes of the two men met, and Brent fell silent.

"Gad, my lad, you're a fool, but you're a brave fool! For Heaven's sake, give me a drink."

"I may go, Colonel?"

"Yes, you may go—as far, that is, as I am concerned. There is the General Staff to get round first."

But though the Colonel's voice was gruff, he seemed to have some difficulty in finding his glass.

As far as is possible in human nature, Jim Brent, at the period when he gained his V.C. in a manner which made him the hero of the hour—one might almost say of the war—was, I believe, without fear. The blow he had received at the hands of the girl who meant all the world to him had rendered him utterly callous of his life. And it was no transitory feeling: the mood of an hour or a week. It was deeper than the ordinary misery of a man who has taken the knock from a woman, deeper and much less ostentatious. He seemed to view life with a contemptuous toleration that in any other man would have been the merest affectation. But it was not evinced

by his words; it was shown, as his Major had said, by his deeds—deeds that could not be called bravado because he never advertised them. He was simply gambling with death, with a cool hand and a steady eye, and sublimely indifferent to whether he won or lost. Up to the time when he played his last great game he had borne a charmed life. According to the book of the words, he should have been killed a score of times, and he told me himself only last week that he went into this final gamble with a taunt on his lips and contempt in his heart. Knowing him as I do, I believe it. I can almost hear him saying to his grim opponent, "Dash it all! I've won every time; for Heaven's sake do something to justify your reputation."

But—he didn't; Jim won again. And when he landed in England from a Dutch tramp, having carried out the maddest and most hazardous exploit of the war unscathed, he slipped up on a piece of orange-peel and broke his right leg in two places, which made him laugh so immoderately when the contrast struck him that it cured him—not his leg, but his mind. However, all in due course.

The first part of the story I heard from Petersen, of the Naval Air Service. I ran into him by accident

in a grocer's shop in Hazebrouck—buying stuff for the mess.

"What news of Jim?" he cried, the instant he saw me.

"Very sketchy," I answered. "He's the worst letter-writer in the world. You know he trod on a bit of orange-peel and broke his leg when he got back to England."

"He would." Petersen smiled. "That's just the sort of thing Jim would do. Men like him usually die of mumps, or the effects of a bad oyster."

"Quite so," I murmured, catching him gently by the arm. "And now come to the pub. over the way and tell me all about it. The beer there is of a less vile brand than usual."

"But I can't tell you anything, my dear chap, that you don't know already!" he expostulated. "I am quite prepared to gargle with you, but——"

"Deux bières, ma'm'selle, s'il vous plait." I piloted Petersen firmly to a little table. "Tell me all, my son!" I cried. "For the purposes of this meeting I know nix, and you as part hero in the affair have got to get it off your chest."

He laughed, and lit a cigarette. "Not much of the heroic in my part of the stunt, I assure you. As you know, the show started from Dunkirk, where in due course Jim arrived, armed with credentials extracted

only after great persuasion from sceptical officers of high rank. How he ever got there at all has always been a wonder to me: his Colonel was the least of his difficulties in that line. But Jim takes a bit of stopping.

"My part of the show was to transport that scatter-brained idiot over the trenches and drop him behind the German lines. His idea was novel, I must admit, though at the time I thought he was mad, and for that matter I still think he's mad. Only a madman could have thought of it, only Jim Brent could have done it and not been killed.

"From a height of three thousand feet, in the middle of the night, he proposed to bid me and the plane a tender farewell and descend to terra firma by means of a parachute."

"Great Scot," I murmured. "Some idea."

"As you say—some idea. The thing was to choose a suitable night. As Jim said, 'the slow descent of a disreputable Belgian peasant like an angel out of the skies will cause a flutter of excitement in the tender heart of the Hun if it is perceived. Therefore, it must be a dark and overcast night.'

"At last, after a week, we got an ideal one. Jim arrayed himself in his togs, took his basket on his arm —you know he'd hidden the gun-cotton in a cheese— and we went round to the machine. By Jove! that

chap's a marvel. Think of it, man." Petersen's face was full of enthusiastic admiration. "He'd never even been up in an aeroplane before, and yet the first time he does, it is with the full intention of trusting himself to an infernal parachute, a thing the thought of which gives me cold feet; moreover, of doing it in the dark from a height of three thousand odd feet behind the German lines with his pockets full of detonators and other abominations, and his cheese full of gun-cotton. Lord! he's a marvel. And I give you my word that of the two of us—though I've flown for over two years—I was the shaky one. He was absolutely cool; not the coolness of a man who is keeping himself under control, but just the normal coolness of a man who is doing his everyday job."

Petersen finished his beer at a gulp, and we encored the dose.

"Well, we got off about two. We were not aiming at any specific spot, but I was going to go due east for three-quarters of an hour, which I estimated should bring us somewhere over Courtrai. Then he was going to drop off, and I was coming back. The time was chosen so that I should be able to land again at Dunkirk about dawn.

"I can't tell you much more. We escaped detection going over the lines, and about ten minutes to three, at a height of three thousand five hundred, old Jim tapped

me on the shoulder. He understood exactly what to do—as far as we could tell him: for the parachute is still almost in its infancy.

"As he had remarked to our wing commander before we started: 'A most valuable experiment, sir; I will report on how it works in due course.'

"We shook hands. I could see him smiling through the darkness; and then, with his basket under his arm, that filthy old Belgian farmer launched himself into space.

"I saw him for a second falling like a stone, and then the parachute seemed to open out all right. But of course I couldn't tell in the dark; and just afterwards I struck an air-pocket, and had a bit of trouble with the bus. After that I turned round and went home again. I'm looking forward to seeing the old boy and hearing what occurred."

And that is the unvarnished account of the first part of Jim's last game with fate. Incidentally, it's the sort of thing that hardly requires any varnishing.

The rest of the yarn I heard later from Brent himself, when I went round to see him in hospital, while I was back on leave.

"For Heaven's sake, lady, dear," he said to the sister as I arrived, "don't let anyone else in. Say I've had a relapse and am biting the bed-clothes. This un-

pleasant-looking man is a great pal of mine, and I would commune with him awhile."

"It's appalling, old boy," he said to me as she went out of the room, "how they cluster. Men of dreadful visage; women who gave me my first bath; unprincipled journalists—all of them come and talk hot air until I get rid of them by swooning. My young sister brought thirty-four school friends round last Tuesday! Of course, my swoon is entirely artificial; but the sister is an understanding soul, and shoos them away." He lit a cigarette.

"I saw Petersen the other day in Hazebrouck," I told him as I sat down by the bed. "He wants to come round and see you as soon as he can get home."

"Good old Petersen. I'd never have brought it off without him."

"What happened, Jim?" I asked. "I've got up to the moment when you left his bus, with your old parachute, and disappeared into space. And of course I've seen the official announcement of the guns being seen in the river, as reported by that R.F.C. man. But there is a gap of about three weeks; and I notice you have not been over-communicative to the half-penny press."

"My dear old man," he answered, seriously, "there was nothing to be communicative about. Thinking it over now, I am astounded how simple the whole thing

was. It was as easy as falling off a log. I fell like a stone for two or three seconds, because the blessed umbrella wouldn't open. Then I slowed up and floated gently downwards. It was a most fascinating sensation. I heard old Petersen crashing about just above me; and in the distance a search-light was moving backwards and forwards across the sky, evidently looking for him. I should say it took me about five minutes to come down; and of course all the way down I was wondering where the devil I was going to land. The country below me was black as pitch: not a light to be seen—not a camp-fire—nothing. As the two things I wanted most to avoid were church steeples and the temporary abode of any large number of Huns, everything looked very favourable. To be suspended by one's trousers from a weathercock in the cold, grey light of dawn seemed a sorry ending to the show; and to land from the skies on a general's stomach requires explanation."

He smiled reminiscently. "I'm not likely to forget that descent, Petersen's engine getting fainter and fainter in the distance, the first pale streaks of light beginning to show in the east, and away on a road to the south the headlamps of a car moving swiftly along. Then the humour of the show struck me. Me, in my most picturesque disguise, odoriferous as a family of ferrets in my borrowed garments, descending

gently on to the Hun like the fairy god-mother in a pantomime. So I laughed, and—wished I hadn't. My knees hit my jaw with a crack, and I very nearly bit my tongue in two. Cheeses all over the place, and there I was enveloped in the folds of the collapsing parachute. Funny, but for a moment I couldn't think what had happened. I suppose I was a bit dizzy from the shock, and it never occurred to me that I'd reached the ground, which, not being able to see in the dark, I hadn't known was so close. Otherwise I could have landed much lighter. Yes, it's a great machine that parachute." He paused to reach for his pipe.

"Where did you land?" I asked.

"In the middle of a ploughed field. Couldn't have been a better place if I'd chosen it. A wood or a river would have been deuced awkward. Yes, there's no doubt about it, old man, my luck was in from the very start. I removed myself from the folds, picked up my cheeses, found a convenient ditch alongside to hide the umbrella in, and then sat tight waiting for dawn.

"I happen to know that part of Belgium pretty well, and when it got light I took my bearings. Petersen had borne a little south of what we intended, which was all to the good—it gave me less walking; but it was just as well I found a sign-post almost at once, as I had no map, of course—far too dangerous; and I wasn't very clear on names of villages, though I'd

memorized the map before leaving. I found I had landed somewhere south of Courtrai, and was about twelve kilometres due north of Tournai.

"And it was just as I'd decided that little fact that I met a horrible Hun, a large and forbidding-looking man. Now, the one thing on which I'd been chancing my arm was the freedom allowed to the Belgians behind the German lines, and luck again stepped in.

"Beyond grunting 'Guten Morgen' he betrayed no interest in me whatever. It was the same all along. I shambled past Uhlans, and officers and generals in motor-cars—Huns of all breeds and all varieties, and no one even noticed me. And after all, why on earth should they?

"About midday I came to Tournai; and here again I was trusting to luck. I'd stopped there three years ago at a small estaminet near the station kept by the widow Demassiet. Now this old lady was, I knew, thoroughly French in sympathies; and I hoped that, in case of necessity, she would pass me off as her brother from Ghent, who was staying with her for a while. Some retreat of this sort was, of course, essential. A homeless vagabond would be bound to excite suspicion.

"Dear old woman—she was splendid. After the war I shall search her out, and present her with an annuity, or a belle vache, or something dear to the

Belgian heart. She never even hesitated. From that night I was her brother, though she knew it meant her death as well as mine if I was discovered.

"'Ah, monsieur,' she said, when I pointed this out to her, 'it is in the hands of le bon Dieu. At the most I have another five years, and these Allemands—pah!' She spat with great accuracy.

"She was good, was the old veuve Demassiet."

Jim puffed steadily at his pipe in silence for a few moments.

"I soon found out that the Germans frequented the estaminet; and, what was more to the point—luck again, mark you—that the gunners who ran the battery I was out after almost lived there. When the battery was at Tournai they had mighty little to do, and they did it, with some skill, round the beer in her big room.

"I suppose you know what my plan was. The next time that battery left Tournai I proposed to cut one of the metals on the bridge over the River Scheldt, just in front of the engine, so close that the driver couldn't stop, and so derail the locomotive. I calculated that if I cut the outside rail—the one nearest the parapet wall—the flange on the inner wheel would prevent the engine turning inwards. That would merely cause delay, but very possibly no more. I hoped, on the contrary, to turn it outwards towards the wall, through

which it would crash, dragging after it with any luck the whole train of guns.

"That being the general idea, so to speak, I wandered off one day to see the bridge. As I expected, it was guarded, but by somewhat indifferent-looking Huns—evidently only lines of communication troops. For all that, I hadn't an idea how I was going to do it. Still, luck, always luck; the more you buffet her the better she treats you.

"One week after I got there I heard the battery was going out: and they were going out that night. As a matter of fact, that hadn't occurred to me before—the fact of them moving by night, but it suited me down to the ground. It appeared they were timed to leave at midnight, which meant they'd cross the bridge about a quarter or half past. And so at nine that evening I pushed gently off and wandered bridgewards.

"Then the fun began. I was challenged, and, having answered thickly, I pretended to be drunk. The sentry, poor devil, wasn't a bad fellow, and I had some cold sausage and beer. And very soon a gurgling noise pronounced the fact that he found my beer good.

"It was then I hit him on the base of his skull with a bit of gas-pipe. That sentry will never drink beer again." Brent frowned. "A nasty blow, a dirty blow, but a necessary blow." He shrugged his shoulders and then went on.

"I took off his top-coat and put it on. I put on his hat and took his rifle and rolled him down the embankment into a bush. Then I resumed his beat. Discipline was a bit lax on that bridge, I'm glad to say; unless you pulled your relief out of bed no one else was likely to do it for you. As you may guess, I did not do much pulling.

"I was using two slabs of gun-cotton to make sure—firing them electrically. I had two dry-cells and two coils of fine wire for the leads. The cells would fire a No. 13 Detonator through thirty yards of those leads—and that thirty yards just enabled me to stand clear of the bridge. It took me twenty minutes to fix it up, and then I had to wait.

"By gad, old boy, you've called me a cool bird; you should have seen me during that wait. I was trembling like a child with excitement: everything had gone so marvellously. And for the first time in the whole show it dawned on me that not only was there a chance of getting away afterwards, but that I actually wanted to. Before that moment I'd assumed on the certainty of being killed."

For a moment he looked curiously in front of him, and a slight smile lurked round the corners of his mouth. Then suddenly, and apropos of nothing, he remarked, "Kathleen Goring tea'd with me yesterday.

Of course, it was largely due to that damned orange-skin, but I—er—did not pass a sleepless night."

Which I took to be indicative of a state of mind induced by the rind of that nutritious fruit, rather than any reference to his broken leg. For when a man has passed unscathed through parachute descents and little things like that, only to lose badly on points to a piece of peel, his sense of humour gets a jog in a crucial place. And a sense of humour is fatal to the hopeless, undying passion. It is almost as fatal, in fact, as a hiccough at the wrong moment.

"It was just about half-past twelve that the train came along. I was standing by the end of the bridge, with my overcoat and rifle showing in the faint light of the moon. The engine-driver waved his arm and shouted something in greeting and I waved back. Then I took the one free lead and waited until the engine was past me. I could see the first of the guns, just coming abreast, and at that moment I connected up with the battery in my pocket. Two slabs of gun-cotton make a noise, as you know, and just as the engine reached the charge, a sheet of flame seemed to leap from underneath the front wheels. The driver hadn't time to do a thing—the engine had left the rails before he knew what had happened. And then things moved. In my wildest moments I had never expected such a success. The engine crashed through

the parapet wall and hung for a moment in space. Then it fell downward into the water, and by the mercy of Allah the couplings held. The first two guns followed it, through the gap it had made, and then the others overturned with the pull before they got there, smashing down the wall the whole way along. Every single gun went wallop into the Scheldt—to say nothing of two passenger carriages containing the gunners and their officers. The whole thing was over in five seconds; and you can put your shirt on it that before the last gun hit the water yours truly had cast away his regalia of office and was legging it like a two-year-old back to the veuve Demassiet and Tournai. It struck me that bridge might shortly become an unhealthy spot."

Jim Brent laughed. "It did. I had to stop on with the old lady for two or three days in case she might be suspected owing to my sudden departure—and things hummed. They shot the feldwebel in charge of the guard; they shot every sentry; they shot everybody they could think of; but—they never even suspected me. I went out and had a look next day, the day I think that R.F.C. man spotted and reported the damage. Two of the guns were only fit for turning into hairpins, and the other four looked very like the morning after.

"Then, after I'd waited a couple of days, I said

good-bye to the old dear and trekked off towards the Dutch frontier, gaining immense popularity, old son, by describing the accident to all the soldiers I met.

"That's all, I think. I had words with a sentry at the frontier, but I put it across him with his own bundook. Then I wandered to our Ambassador, and sailed for England in due course. And—er—that's that."

Such is the tale of Jim Brent's V.C. There only remains for me to give the wording of his official report on the matter.

"I have the honour to report," it ran, "that at midnight on the 25th ult., I successfully derailed the train conveying six guns of calibre estimated at about 9-inch, each mounted on a railway truck. The engine, followed by the guns, departed from sight in about five seconds, and fell through a drop of some sixty feet into the River Scheldt from the bridge just west of Tournai. The gunners and officers—who were in two coaches in rear—were also killed. Only one seemed aware that there was danger, and he, owing to his bulk, was unable to get out of the door of his carriage. He was, I think, in command. I investigated the damage next day when the military authorities were a little calmer, and beg to state that I do not consider the guns have been improved by their immersion. One, at least, has disappeared in the mud. A

large number of Germans who had no connection with this affair have, I am glad to report, since been shot for it.

"I regret that I am unable to report in person, but I am at present in hospital with a broken leg, sustained by my inadvertently stepping on a piece of orange-peel, which escaped my notice owing to its remarkable similarity to the surrounding terrain. This similarity was doubtless due to the dirt on the orange-peel."

Which, I may say, should not be taken as a model for official reports by the uninitiated.

CHAPTER VI

RETRIBUTION

ON the Promenade facing the Casino at Monte Carlo two men were seated smoking. The Riviera season was at its height, and passing to and fro in front of them were the usual crowd of well-dressed idlers, who make up the society of that delectable, if expensive, resort. Now and again a casual acquaintance would saunter by, to be greeted with a smile from one, and a curt nod from the other, who, with his eyes fixed on the steps in front of him, seemed oblivious of all else.

"Cheer up, Jerry; she won't be long. Give the poor girl time to digest her luncheon." The cheerful one of the twain lit a cigarette; and in the process received the glad eye from a passing siren of striking aspect. "Great Cæsar, old son!" he continued, when she was swallowed up in the crowd, "you're losing the chance of a lifetime. Here, gathered together to bid us welcome, are countless beautiful women and brave men. We are for the moment the star turn of the show—the brave British sailors whom the ladies delight to hon-

our. Never let it be said, old dear, that you failed them in this their hour of need."

"Confound it, Ginger, I know all about that!" The other man sighed and, coming suddenly out of his brown study, he too leant forward and fumbled for his cigarette-case. "But it's no go, old man. I'm getting a deuced sight too old and ugly nowadays to chop and change about. There comes a time of life when if a man wants to kiss one particular woman, he might as well kiss his boot for all the pleasure fooling around with another will give him."

Ginger Lawson looked at him critically. "My lad, I fear me that Nemesis has at length descended on you. No longer do the ortolans and caviare of unregenerate bachelorhood tempt you; rather do you yearn for ground rice and stewed prunes in the third floor back. These symptoms——"

"Ginger," interrupted the other, "dry up. You're a dear, good soul, but when you try to be funny, I realise the type of man who writes mottoes for crackers." He started up eagerly, only to sit down again disappointed.

"Not she, not she, my love," continued the other imperturbably. "And, in the meanwhile, doesn't it strike you that you are committing a bad tactical error in sitting here, with a face like a man that's eaten a bad oyster, on the very seat where she's bound to see

you when she does finish her luncheon and come down?"

"I suppose that means you want me to cocktail with you?"

"More impossible ideas have fructified," agreed Ginger, rising.

"No, I'm blowed if——!"

"Come on, old son." Lawson dragged him reluctantly to his feet. "All the world loves a lover, including the loved one herself; but you look like a deaf-mute at a funeral, who's swallowed his fee. Come and have a cocktail at Ciro's, and then, merry and bright and caracoling like a young lark, return and snatch her from under the nose of the accursed Teuton."

"Do you think she's going to accept him, Ginger?" he muttered anxiously, as they sauntered through the drifting crowd.

"My dear boy, ask me another. But she's coming to the ball dance on board to-night, and if the delicate pink illumination of your special kala jugger, shining softly on your virile face, and toning down the somewhat vivid colour scheme of your sunburned nose, doesn't melt her heart, I don't know what will——"

Which all requires a little explanation. Before the war broke out it was the custom each year for that portion of the British Fleet stationed in the Mediter-

ranean, and whose headquarters were at Malta, to make a cruise lasting three weeks or a month to some friendly sea-coast, where the ports were good and the inhabitants merry. Trieste, perhaps, and up the Adriatic; Alexandria and the countries to the East; or, best of all, the Riviera. And at the time when my story opens the officers of the British Mediterranean Fleet, which had come to rest in the wonderful natural anchorage of Villefranche, were doing their best to live up to the reputation which the British naval officer enjoys the world over. Everywhere within motor distance of their vessels they were greeted with joy and acclamation; there were dances and dinners, women and wine—and what more for a space can any hard-worked sailor-man desire? During their brief intervals of leisure they slept and recuperated on board, only to dash off again with unabated zeal to pastures new, or renewed, as the case might be.

Foremost amongst the revellers on this, as on other occasions, was Jerry Travers, torpedo-lieutenant on the flagship. Endowed by Nature with an infinite capacity for consuming cocktails, and with a disposition which not even the catering of the Maltese mess man could embitter, his sudden fall from grace was all the more noticeable. From being a tireless leader of revels, he became a mooner in secret places, a melancholy sigher in the wardroom. Which fact did not escape

the eyes of the flagship wardroom officers. And Lawson, the navigating lieutenant, had deputed himself as clerk of the course.

Staying at the Hôtel de Paris was an American, who was afflicted with the dreadful name of Honks; with him were his wife and his daughter Maisie. Maisie Honks has not a prepossessing sound; but she was the girl who was responsible for Jerry Travers's downfall. He had met her at a ball in Nice just after the Fleet arrived, and, from that moment he had become a trifle deranged. Brother officers entering his cabin unawares found him gazing into the infinite with a slight squint. His Marine servant spread the rumour on the lower deck that " 'e'd taken to poetry, and 'orrible noises in his sleep." Like a goodly number of men who have walked merrily through life, sipping at many flowers, but leaving each with added zest for the next, when he took it he took it hard. And Maisie had just about reduced him to idiocy. I am no describer of girls, but I was privileged to know and revere the lady from afar, and I can truthfully state that I have rarely, if ever, seen a more absolute dear. She wasn't fluffy, and she wasn't statuesque; she did not have violet eyes which one may liken to mountain pools, or hair of that colour described as spun-gold. She was just—Maisie, one of the most adorable girls that ever happened. And Jerry, as I say, had taken it very badly.

Unfortunately, there was a fly in the ointment—almost of bluebottle size—in the shape of another occupant of the Hôtel de Paris, who had also taken it very badly, and at a much earlier date. The Baron von Dressler—an officer in the German Navy, and a member of one of the oldest Prussian families—had been staying at Monte Carlo for nearly a month, on sick leave after a severe dose of fever. And he, likewise, worshipped with ardour and zeal at the Honks shrine. Moreover, being apparently a very decent fellow, and living as he did in the same hotel, he had, as Jerry miserably reflected, a bit of a preponderance in artillery, especially as he had opened fire more than a fortnight before the British Navy had appeared on the scene. This, then, was the general situation; and the particular feature of the moment, which caused an outlook on life even more gloomy than usual in the heart of the torpedo-lieutenant, was that the Baron von Dressler had been invited to lunch with his adored one, while he had not.

"Something potent, Fritz." Lawson piloted him firmly to the bar and addressed the presiding being respectfully. "Something potent and heady which will make this officer's sad heart bubble once again with the joie de vivre. He has been crossed in love."

"Don't be an ass, Ginger," said the other peevishly.

"My dear fellow, the credit of the Navy is at stake. Admitted that you've had a bad start in the Honks stakes, nevertheless—you never know—our Teuton may take a bad fall. And, incidentally, there they both are, to say nothing of Honks père et mère." He was peering through the window. "No, you don't, my boy!" as the other made a dash for the door. "The day is yet young. Lap it up; repeat the dose; and then in the nonchalant style for which our name is famous we will sally forth and have at them."

"Confound it, Ginger! they seem to be on devilish good terms. Look at the blighter, bending towards her as if he owned her." Travers stood in the window rubbing his hands with his handkerchief nervously.

"What d'you expect him to do? Look the other way?" The navigating officer snorted. "You make me tired, Torps. Come along if you're ready; and try and look jaunty and debonair."

"Heavens! old boy; I'm as nervous as an ugly girl at her first party." They were passing into the street. "My hands are clammy and my boots are bursting with feet."

"I don't mind about your boots; but for goodness' sake dry your hands. No self-respecting woman would look at a man with perspiring palms."

Ten minutes later three pairs of people might have

been seen strolling up and down the Promenade. And as the arrangement of those pairs was entirely due to the navigating lieutenant, their composition is perhaps worthy of a paragraph. At one end, as was very right and proper, Jerry and Miss Honks discussed men and matters—at least, I assume so—with a zest that seemed to show his nervousness was only transient. In the middle the stage-manager and Mrs. Honks discussed Society, with a capital "S"—a subject of which the worthy woman knew nothing and talked a lot. At the other end Mr. Honks poured into the unresponsive ear of an infuriated Prussian nobleman his new scheme for cornering sausages. Which shows what a naval officer can do when he gets down to it.

. . . . .

Now, it is certainly not my intention to recount in detail the course of Jerry Travers's love affair during his stay on the Riviera. Sufficient to say, it did not run smoothly. But there are one or two things which I must relate—things which concern our three principals. They cover the first round in the contest—the round which the German won on points. And though they have no actual bearing on the strange happenings which brought about the second and last round, in circumstances nothing short of miraculous at a future date, yet for the proper understanding of the retribu-

tion that came upon the Hun at the finish it is well that they should be told.

They occurred that same evening, at the ball given by the British Navy on the flagship. Few sights, I venture to think, are more imposing, and to a certain extent more incongruous, than a battleship in gala mood. For days beforehand, men skilled in electricity erect with painstaking care a veritable fairyland of coloured lights, which shine softly on the deck cleared for dancing, and discreet kala juggers prepared with equal care by officers skilled in love. Everywhere there is peace and luxury; the music of the band steals across the silent water; the engine of death is at rest. Almost can one imagine the mighty turbines, the great guns, the whole infernal paraphernalia of destruction, laughing grimly at their master's amusements—those masters whose brains forged them and riveted them and gave them birth; who with the pressure of a finger can launch five tons of death at a speck ten miles away; whose lightest caprice they are bound to obey—and yet who now cover them with flimsy silks and fairy lights, while they dance and make love to laughing, soft-eyed girls. And perhaps there was some such idea in the gunnery-lieutenant's mind as he leant against the breech of a twelve-inch gun, waiting for his particular guest. "Not yet, old man," he muttered thoughtfully

—"not yet. To-night we play; to-morrow—who knows?"

Above, the lights shone out unshaded, silhouetting the battle-cruiser with lines of fire against the vault of heaven, sprinkled with the golden dust of a myriad stars; while ceaselessly across the violet water steam-pinnaces dashed backwards and forwards, carrying boatloads of guests from the landing-stage, and then going back for more. At the top of the gangway the admiral, immaculate in blue and gold, welcomed them as they arrived; the flag-lieutenant, with the weight of much responsibility on his shoulders, having just completed a last lightning tour of the ship, only to discover a scarcity of hairpins in the ladies' cloak-room, stood behind him. And in the wardroom the engineer-commander—a Scotsman of pessimistic outlook—reviled with impartiality all ball dances, adding a special clause for the one now commencing. But then, off duty, he had no soul above bridge.

In this setting, then, appeared the starters for the Honks stakes on the night in question, only, for the time being, the positions were reversed. Now the Baron was the stranger in a strange land; Jerry was at home—one of the hosts. Moreover, as has already been discreetly hinted, there was a certain and very particular kala jugger. And into this very particular

kala jugger Jerry, in due course, piloted his adored one.

I am now coming to the region of imagination. I was not in that dim-lit nook with them, and therefore I am not in a position to state with any accuracy what occurred. But—and here I must be discreet—there was a midshipman, making up in cheek and inquisitiveness what he lacked in years and stature. Also, as I have said, the Honks stakes were not a private matter—far from it. The prestige of the British Navy was at stake, and betting ran high in the gunroom, or abode of "snotties." Where this young imp of mischief hid, I know not; he swore himself that his overhearing was purely accidental, and endeavoured to excuse his lamentable conduct by saying that he learned a lot!

His account of the engagement was breezy and nautical; and as there is, so far as I know, no other description of the operations extant, I give it for what it is worth.

Jerry, he told me in the Union Club, Valetta, at a later date, opened the action with some tentative shots from his lighter armament. For ten minutes odd he alternately Honked and Maisied, till, as my ribald informant put it, the deck rang with noises reminiscent of a jibbing motor-car. She countered ably with

rhapsodies over the ship, the band, and life in general, utterly refusing to be drawn into personalities.

Then, it appeared, Jerry's self-control completely deserted him, and with a hoarse and throaty noise he opened fire with the full force of his starboard broadside; he rammed down the loud pedal and let drive.

He assured her that she was the only woman he could ever love; he seized her ungloved hand and fervently kissed it; in short, he offered her his hand and heart in the most approved style, the while protesting his absolute unworthiness to aspire to such an honour as her acceptance of the same.

"Net result, old dear," murmured my graceless informant, pressing the bell for another cocktail, "nix—a frost absolute, a frost complete."

"She thought he and the whole ship were bully, and wasn't that little boy who'd brought them out in the launch the cutest ever, but she reckoned sailors cut no ice with poppa. She was just too sorry for words it had ever occurred, but there it was, and there was nothing more to be said."

For the truth of these statements I will not vouch. I do know that on the night in question Jerry was refused by the only woman he'd ever really cared about, because he told me so, and the method of it is of little account. And if there be any who may think I have dealt with this tragedy in an unfeeling way, I must

plead in excuse that I have but quoted my informant, and he was one of those in the gunroom who had lost money on the event.

Anyway, let me, as a sop to the serious-minded, pass on to the other little event which I must chronicle before I come to my finale. In this world the serious and the gay, the tears and the laughter, come to us out of the great scroll of fate in strange, jumbled succession. The lucky dip at a bazaar holds no more variegated procession of surprises than the mix up we call life brings to each and all. And so, though my tone in describing Jerry's proposal has perhaps been wantonly flippant, and though the next incident may seem to some to savour of melodrama—yet, is it not life, my masters, is it not life?

I was in the ward-room when it occurred. Jerry, standing by the fireplace, was smoking a cigarette, and looking like the proverbial gentleman who has lost a sovereign and found sixpence. There were several officers in there at the time, and—the Baron von Dressler. And the Prussian had been drinking.

Not that he was by any means drunk, but he was in that condition when some men become merry, some confidential, some—what shall I say?—not exactly pugnacious, but on the way to it. He belonged to the latter class. All the worst traits of the Prussian officer, the domineering, sneering, aggressive mannerisms

—which, to do him justice, in normal circumstances he successfully concealed, at any rate, when mixing with other nationalities—were showing clearly in his face. He was once again the arrogant, intolerant autocrat—truly, *in vino veritas*. Moreover, his eyes were wandering with increasing frequency to Jerry, who, so far, seemed unconscious of the scrutiny.

After a while I caught Ginger Lawson's eye and he shrugged his shoulders slightly. He told me afterwards that he had been fearing a flare-up for some minutes, but had hoped it would pass over. However, he strolled over to Jerry and started talking.

"Mop that up, Jerry," he said, "and come along and do your duty. Baron, you don't seem to be dancing much to-night. Can't I find you a partner?"

"Thank you, but I probably know more people here than you do." The tone even more than the words was a studied insult. "Lieutenant Travers's duty seems to have been unpleasant up to date, which perhaps accounts for his reluctance to resume it. Are you—er—lucky at cards?" This time the sneer was too obvious to be disregarded.

Jerry looked up, and the eyes of the two men met. "It is possible, Baron von Dressler," he remarked icily, "that in your navy remarks of that type are regarded as witty. Would it be asking you too much

to request that you refrain from using them in a ship where they are merely considered vulgar?"

By this time a dead silence had settled on the ward-room, one of those awkward silences which any scene of this sort produces on those who are in the unfortunate position of onlookers.

Von Dressler was white with passion. "You forget yourself, lieutenant. I would have you to know that my uncle is a prince of the blood royal."

"That apparently does not prevent his nephew from failing to remember the customs that hold amongst gentlemen."

"Gentlemen!" The Prussian looked round the circle of silent officers with a scornful laugh; the fumes of the spirits he had drunk were mounting to his head with his excitement. "You mean—shopkeepers."

With a muttered curse several officers started forward; no ball is a teetotal affair, I suppose, and scenes of this sort are dangerous at any time. Travers held up his hand, sharply, incisively.

"Gentlemen, remember this—er—Prussian officer and gentleman is our guest. That being the case, sir" —he turned to the German—"you are quite safe in insulting us as much as you like."

"The question of safety would doubtless prove irresistible to an Englishman." The face of the German was distorted with rage, he seemed to be searching in

his mind for insults; then suddenly he tried a new line.

"Bah! I am not a guttersnipe to bandy words with you. You will not have long to wait, you English, and then—when the day does come, my friends; when, at last, we come face to face, then, by God! then——"

"Well, what then, Baron von Dressler?" A stern voice cut like a whiplash across the wardroom; standing in the door was the admiral himself, who had entered unperceived.

For a moment the coarse, furious face of the Prussian paled a little; then with a supreme effort of arrogance he pulled himself together. "Then, sir, we shall see—the world will see—whether you or we will be the victor. The old and effete versus the new and efficient. Der Tag." He lifted his hand and let it drop; in the silence one could have heard a pin drop.

"The problem you raise is of interest," answered the admiral, in the same icy tone. "In the meanwhile any discussion is unprofitable; and in the surroundings in which you find yourself at present it is more than unprofitable—it is a gross breach of all good form and service etiquette. As our guest we were pleased to see you; you will pardon my saying that now I can no longer regard you as a guest. Will you kindly give orders, Lieutenant Travers, for a steam-pinnace? Baron von Dressler will go ashore."

Such was the other matter that concerned my principals, and which, of necessity, I have had to record. Such an incident is probably almost unique; but when there's a girl at the bottom of things and wine at the top, something is likely to happen. The most unfortunate thing about it all, as far as Jerry was concerned, was an untimely indisposition on the part of Honks mère. As a coincidence nothing could have been more disastrous.

The pinnace was at the foot of the gangway, and the Baron—his eyes savage—was just preparing to take an elaborate and sarcastic farewell of the silent torpedo-lieutenant, who was regarding him with an air of cold contempt, when Mr. Honks appeared on the scene.

"Say, Baron, are you going away?"

"I am, Mr. Honks. My presence seems distasteful to the officers."

The American seemed hardly to hear the last part of the remark. "I guess we'll quit too. My wife's been taken bad. Can we come in your boat, Baron?"

"I shall be more than delighted." His eyes came round with ill-concealed triumph to Travers's impassive face as the American bustled away. "I venture to think that the Honks stakes are still open."

"By Heaven! You blackguard!" muttered Jerry, his passion overcoming him for a moment. "I be-

lieve I'd give my commission to smash your damned face in with a marline-spike and chuck you into the sea."

"I won't forget what you say," answered the German vindictively. "One day I'll make you eat those words; and then when I've sunk your rat-eaten ship, it will be me that uses the marline-spike—you swine."

It was as well for Jerry, and for the Baron too, that at this psychological moment the Honks ménage arrived, otherwise that German would probably have gone into the sea.

"Good night, lady," murmured Jerry, when he had solicitously inquired after her mother's health. "Is there no hope?" He was desperately anxious to seize the second or two left; he knew she would not hear the true account of what had happened from the Baron.

"I guess not," she answered softly. "But come and call." With a smile she was gone, and from the boat there came the Baron's voice mocking through the still air, "Good night, Lieutenant Travers. Thank you so much."

And, drowned by the band that started at that moment, the wonderful and fearful curse that left the torpedo-lieutenant's lips drifted into the night unheard.

. . . . .

Let us go on a couple of years. The moment thought of by the gunnery-lieutenant, the day acclaimed by the Prussian officer had come. England was at war. Der Tag was a reality. No longer did silks and shaded lights form part of the equipment of the Navy, but grim and sombre, ruthlessly stripped of everything not absolutely necessary, the great grey monsters watched tirelessly through the flying scud of the North Sea for "the fleet that stayed at home." Only their submarines were out, and these, day by day, diminished in numbers, until the men who sent them out looked at one another fearfully—so many went out, so few came back.

Tearing through the water one day, away a bit to the south-west of Bantry Bay, with the haze of Ireland lying like a smudge on the horizon, was a lean, villainous-looking torpedo-boat-destroyer. She was plunging her nose into the slight swell, now and again drenching the oilskinned figure standing motionless on the bridge. Behind her a great cloud of black smoke drifted across the grey water, and the whole vessel was quivering with the force of her engines. She was doing her maximum and a bit more, but still the steady, watchful eyes of the officer on the bridge seemed impatient, and every now and again he cursed softly and with wonderful fluency under his breath.

It was our friend Jerry, who at the end of his time

on the flagship had been given one of the newest T.B.D.'s, and now with every ounce he could get out of her he was racing towards the spot from which had come the last S.O.S. message, nearly an hour ago. There was something grimly foreboding about those agonised calls sent out to the world for perhaps twenty minutes, and then—silence, nothing more. German submarines, he reflected, as for the tenth time he peered at his wrist-watch, German submarines engaged once again in the only form of war they could compete in or dared undertake. And not for the first time his thoughts went back to the vainglorious boastings of his friend the Baron.

"Damn him," he muttered. "I haven't forgotten the sweep."

There were many things he hadn't forgotten; how, when he'd gone to call on the lady as requested, she had been "out," and it was that sort of "out" that means "in." How a letter had been answered courteously but distinctly coldly, and, impotent with rage, he had been forced to the conclusion that she was offended with him. And with the Prussian able to say what he liked, it was not difficult to find the reason.

Then the Fleet left, and Jerry resigned himself to the inevitable, a proceeding which was not made easier by the many rumours he heard to the effect that the

Baron himself had done the trick. Distinctly he wanted once again to meet that gentleman.

"We ought to see her, if she hasn't sunk, sir, by now." The sub-lieutenant on the bridge spoke in his ear.

Travers nodded and shrugged his shoulders. He had realised that fact for some minutes.

"Something on the starboard bow." The voice of the look-out man came to his ears.

"It's a boat, an open boat," cried the sub., after a careful inspection, "and it's pretty full, by Jove!"

A curt order, and the T.B.D. swung round and tore down on the little speck bobbing in the water. And they were still a few hundred yards away when a look of dawning horror strangely mixed with joy spread over Jerry's face. His glass was fixed on the boat, and who in God's name was the woman—impossible, of course—but surely. . . . If it wasn't her it was her twin sister; his hand holding the glass trembled with eagerness, and then at last he knew. The woman standing up in the stern of the boat *was* Maisie, and as he got nearer he saw there was a look on her face which made him catch his breath sharply.

"Great God!" The sub's voice roused him. "What have they been doing?" No need to ask whom he meant by "they." "The boat is a shambles."

The destroyer slowed down, and from the crew who

looked into that little open boat came dreadful curses. It ran with blood; and at the bottom women and children moaned feebly, while an elderly man contorted with pain in the stern, writhed and sobbed in agony. And over this black scene the eyes of the man and the woman met.

"Carefully, carefully, lads," Travers sang out. This was no time for questions, only the poor torn fragments counted. Afterwards, perhaps. Very tenderly the sailors lifted out the bodies, and one of them—a little girl in his arms, with a dreadful wound in her head—jabbered like a maniac with the fury of his rage. And so after many days they again came face to face.

"Are you wounded?" he whispered.

"No." Her voice was hard and strained; she was near the breaking point. "They sunk us without warning—the *Lucania*—and then shelled us in the open boats."

"Dear heavens!" Jerry's voice was shaking. "Ah! but you're not hurt, my lady; they didn't hit you?"

"My mother was drowned, and my father too." She was swaying a little. "It was the U 99."

"Ah!" The man's voice was almost a sigh.

"Submarine on the port bow, sir." A howl came from the look-out, followed by the sharp, detonating reports of the destroyer's quick-firers. And then a

roaring cheer. Like lightning Jerry was upon the bridge, and even he could scarcely contain himself. There, lying helpless in the water, with a huge hole in her conning tower, wallowed the U 99. Two direct hits from the destroyer's guns in a vital spot, and the submarine was a submarine no longer. Just one of those strokes of poetic justice which happen so rarely in war.

Like rats from a sinking ship the Germans were pouring up and diving into the water, and with snarling faces the Englishmen waited for them, waited for them with the dying proofs of their vileness still lying on the deck as one by one they came on board. Suddenly with a sucking noise the submarine foundered, and over the seething, troubled waters where she had been a sheet of blackish oil slowly spread.

But Jerry spared no glance for the sinking boat—he did not so much as look at the German sailors huddled fearfully together. With hard, merciless eyes he faced the submarine commander. For the first time in his life he saw red: for the first time in his life there was murder in his soul, and the heavy belaying-pin in his hand seemed to goad him on. "Suppose the positions had been reversed," mocked a voice in his brain. "Would he have hesitated?" The night two years ago surged back to his mind; the plaintive crying of the dying child struck on his ears. He stepped a

pace forward with a snarl—his grip tightened on the bar—when suddenly the man who had carried up the little girl gave a hoarse cry, and with all his force smote the nearest German in the mouth. The German fell like a stone.

"Stand fast." Jerry's voice dominated the scene. The old traditions had come back: the old wonderful discipline. The iron pin dropped with a clang on the deck. "It is not their fault, they were only obeying his orders." And once again his eyes rested on their officer.

"So we meet again, Baron von Dressler," he remarked, "and the rat-eaten ship is not sunk. Is this your work?" He pointed to the mangled bodies.

"It is not," muttered the Prussian.

"You lie, you swine, you lie! Unfortunately for you you didn't quite carry out your infamous butchery completely enough. There is one person on board who knows the U 99 sank the *Lucania* without warning and was in the boat you shelled."

"I don't believe you, I——"

"Then perhaps you'll believe her. I rather think you know her—very well." As he spoke he was looking behind the Prussian, to where Maisie—roused from her semi-stupor by the Baron's voice—had got up, and with her hand to her heart was swaying backwards and forwards. "Look behind you, you cur."

The Prussian turned, and then with a cry staggered back, white to the lips. "You, great heavens, you—Maisie——"

And so once again the three principals of my little drama were face to face: only the setting had changed. No longer sensuous music and the warm, violet waters of the Riviera for a background; this time the moaning of dying men and children was the ghastly orchestra, and, with the grey scud of the Atlantic flying past them, the Englishman and the German faced one another, while the American girl stood by. And watching them were the muttering sailors.

At last she spoke. "This ring, I believe, is yours." She took a magnificent half-hoop of diamonds from her engagement finger and flung it into the sea. Then she moved towards him.

"You drowned my mother, and for that I strike you once." She hit him in the face with an iron-shod pin. "You drowned my father, and for that I strike you again." Once again she struck him in the face. "I will leave a fighting man and a gentleman to deal with you for those poor mites." With a choking sob she turned away, and once again sank down on the coil of rope.

The Prussian, sobbing with pain and rage, with the blood streaming from his face, was not a pretty sight; but in Travers's face there was no mercy.

"'The old and effete versus the new and efficient!' I seem to recall those words from our last meeting. May I congratulate you on your efficiency? Bah! you swine"—his face flamed with sudden passion—"if you aren't skulking in Kiel, you're butchering women. By heavens! I can conceive of nothing more utterly perfect than flogging you to death."

The Prussian shrank back, his face livid with fear.

"They were my orders," he muttered. "For God's sake——"

"Oh, don't be frightened, Baron von Dressler." The Englishman's voice was once again under control. "The old and effete don't do that. You were safe as our guest two years ago; you are safe as our prisoner now. Your precious carcass will be returned safe and sound to your Royal uncle at the end of the war, and my only hope is that your face will still bear those honourable scars. Moreover, if what you say is true, if the orders of your Government include shelling an open boat crammed with defenceless women and children—and neutrals at that—I can only say that their infamy is so incredible as to force one to the conclusion that they are not responsible for their actions. But—make no mistake—they will get their retribution."

For a moment he fell silent, looking at the cower-

ing, blood-stained face opposite him, and then a pitiful wail behind him made him turn round.

"Mummie, I'se hurted." On her knees beside the little girl was Maisie, soothing her as best she could, easing the throbbing head, whispering that mummie couldn't come for a while. "I'se hurted, mummie—I'se hurted."

Travers turned back again, and the eyes of the two men met.

"My God! Is it possible that a sailor could do such a thing?"

His voice was barely above a whisper, yet the Prussian heard and winced. In the depths of even the foulest bully there is generally some little redeeming spark.

"I'se hurted; I want my mummie."

The Prussian's lips moved, but no sound came, while in his eyes was the look of a man haunted. Travers watched him silently; and at length he spoke again.

"As I said, your rulers will get their deserts in time, but I think, Baron von Dressler, your Nemesis has come on you already. That little poor kid is asking you for her mother. Don't forget it in the years to come, Baron. No, I don't think you *will* forget it."

My story is finished. Later on, when some of the dreadful nightmare through which she had passed had

been effaced from her mind, Maisie and the man who had come to her out of the grey waters discussed many things. And the story which the Prussian had told her after the dance on the flagship was finally discredited.

Can anyone recommend me a good cheap book on "Things a Best Man Should Know"?

CHAPTER VII

THE DEATH GRIP

TWO reasons have impelled me to tell the story of Hugh Latimer, and both I think are good and sufficient. First I was his best friend, and second I know more about the tragedy than anyone else—even including his wife. I saw the beginning and the end; she—poor broken-hearted girl—saw only the end.

There have been many tragedies since this war started; there will be many more before Finis is written,—and each, I suppose, to its own particular sufferers seems the worst. But, somehow, to my mind Hugh's case is without parallel, unique—the devil's arch of cruelty. I will give you the story—and you shall judge for yourself.

Let us lift the curtain and present a dug-out in a support trench somewhere near Givenchy. A candle gutters in a bottle, the grease running down like a miniature stalactite congeals on an upturned packing-case. On another packing-case the remnants of a tongue, some sardines, and a goodly array of bottles with some tin mugs and plates completes the furniture—or almost.

I must not omit the handsome coloured pictures—three in all—of ladies of great beauty and charm, clad in—well, clad in something at any rate. The occupants of this palatial abode were Hugh Latimer and myself; at the rise of the curtain both lying in corners, on piles of straw.

Outside, a musician was coaxing noises from a mouth-organ; occasional snatches of song came through the open entrance, intermingled with bursts of laughter. One man, I remember, was telling an interminable story which seemed to be the history of a gentleman called Nobby Clark, who had dallied awhile with a lady in an estaminet at Bethune, and had ultimately received a knock-out blow with a frying-pan over the right eye, for being too rapid in his attentions. Just the usual dull, strange, haunting trench life—which varies not from day's end to day's end.

At intervals a battery of our own let drive, the blast of the explosion catching one through the open door; at intervals a big German shell moaned its way through the air overhead—an express bound for somewhere. Had you looked out to the front, you would have seen the bright green flares lobbing monotonously up into the night, all along the line. War—modern war; boring, incredible when viewed in cold blood. . . .

"Hullo, Hugh." A voice at the door roused us both

from our doze, and the Adjutant came in. "Will you put your watches right by mine? We are making a small local attack to-morrow morning, and the battalion is to leave the trenches at 6.35 exactly."

"Rather sudden, isn't it?" queried Hugh, setting his watch.

"Just come through from Brigade Headquarters. Bombs are being brought up to H.15. Further orders sent round later. Bye-bye."

He was gone, and once more we sat thinking to the same old accompaniment of trench noises; but in rather a different frame of mind. To-morrow morning at 6.35 peace would cease; we should be out and running over the top of the ground; we should be . . .

"Will they use gas, I wonder?" Hugh broke the silence.

"Wind too fitful," I answered; "and I suppose it's only a small show."

"I wonder what it's for. I wish one knew more about these affairs; I suppose one can't, but it would make it more interesting."

The mouth-organ stopped; there were vigorous demands for an encore.

"Poor devils," he went on after a moment. "I wonder how many?—I wonder how many?"

"A new development for you, Hugh." I grinned

at him. "Merry and bright, old son—your usual motto, isn't it?"

He laughed. "Dash it, Ginger—you can't always be merry and bright. I don't know why—perhaps it's second sight—but I feel a sort of presentiment of impending disaster to-night. I had the feeling before Clements came in."

"Rot, old man," I answered cheerfully. "You'll probably win a V.C., and the greatest event of the war will be when it is presented to your cheeild."

Which prophecy was destined to prove the cruellest mixture of truth and fiction the mind of man could well conceive. . . .

"Good Lord!" he said irritably, taking me seriously for a moment; "we're a bit too old soldiers to be guyed by palaver about V.C.'s." Then he recovered his good temper. "No, Ginger, old thing, there's big things happening to-morrow. Hugh Latimer's life is going into the melting-pot. I'm as certain of it as—as that I'm going to have a whisky and soda." He laughed, and delved into a packing-case for the seltzogene.

"How's the son and heir?" I asked after a while.

"Going strong," he answered. "Going strong, the little devil."

And then we fell silent, as men will at such a time. The trench outside was quiet; the musician, having obliged with his encore, no longer rendered the night

hideous—even the guns were still. What would it be to-morrow night? Should I still be . . . ? I shook myself and started to scribble a letter; I was getting afraid of inactivity—afraid of my thoughts.

"I'm going along the trenches," said Hugh suddenly, breaking the long silence. "I want to see the Sergeant-Major and give some orders."

He was gone, and I was alone. In spite of myself my thoughts would drift back to what he had been saying, and from there to his wife and the son and heir. My mind, overwrought, seemed crowded with pictures: they jumbled through my brains like a film on a cinematograph.

I saw his marriage, the bridal arch of officers' swords, the sweet-faced, radiant girl. And then his house came on to the screen—the house where I had spent many a pleasant week-end while we trained and sweated to learn the job in England. He was a man of some wealth was Hugh Latimer, and his house showed it; showed moreover his perfect, unerring taste. Bits of stuff, curios, knick-knacks from all over the world met one in odd corners; prints, books, all of the very best, seemed to fit into the scheme as if they'd grown there. Never did a single thing seem to whisper as you passed, "I'm really very rare and beautiful, but I've been dragged into the wrong place, and now I know I'm merely vulgar."

There are houses I wot of where those clamorous whispers drown the nightingales. But if you can pass through rooms full of bric-à-brac—silent bric-à-brac: bric-à-brac conscious of its rectitude and needing no self apology, you may be certain that the owner will not give you port that is improved by a cigarette.

Then came the son, and Hugh's joy was complete. A bit of a dreamer, a bit of a poet, a bit of a philosopher, but with a virility all his own; a big man—a man in a thousand, a man I was proud to call Friend. And he—at the dictates of "Kultur"—was to-morrow at 6.35 going to expose himself to the risk of death, in order to wrest from the Hun a small portion of unprepossessing ground. Truly, humour is not dead in the world! . . .

A step outside broke the reel of pictures, and the Sapper Officer looked in. "I hear a whisper of activity in the dark and stilly morn," he remarked brightly. "Won't it be nice?"

"Very," I said sarcastically. "Are you coming?"

"No, dear one. That's why I thought it would be so nice. My opposite number and tireless companion and helper to-morrow morning will prance over the greensward with you, leading his merry crowd of minions, bristling with bowie knives, sand-bags, and other impedimenta."

"Oh! go to Hell," I said crossly. "I want to write a letter."

"Cheer up, Ginger." He dropped his bantering tone. "I'll be up to drink a glass of wine with you to-morrow night in the new trench. Tell Latimer that the wire is all right—it's been thinned out and won't stop him, and that there are ladders for getting out of the trench on each traverse."

"Have you been working?" I asked.

"Four hours, and got caught by shrapnel in the middle. Night-night, and good luck, old man."

He was gone; and when he had, I wished him back again. For the game wasn't new to him—he'd done it before; and I hadn't. It tends to give one confidence. . . .

It was about four I woke up. For a few blissful moments I lay forgetful; then I turned and saw Hugh. There was a new candle in the bottle, and by its flicker I saw the glint in his sombre eyes, the clear-cut line of his profile. And I remembered. . . .

I felt as if something had caught me by the stomach —inside: a sinking feeling, a feeling of nausea: and for a while I lay still. Outside in the darkness the men were rousing themselves; now and again a curse was muttered as someone tripped over a leg he didn't see; and once the Sergeant-Major's voice rang out—" 'Ere, strike a light with them breakfasts."

"Awake, Ginger?" Hugh prodded me with his foot. "You'd better get something inside you, and then we'll go round and see that everything is O.K."

"Have you had any sleep, Hugh?"

"No. I've been reading." He put Maeterlinck's "Blue Bird" on the table. With his finger on the title he looked at me musingly, "Shall we find it to-day, I wonder?"

. . . . .

I have lingered perhaps a little long on what is after all only the introduction to my story. But it is mainly for the sake of Hugh's wife that I have written it at all; to show her how he passed the last few hours before—the change came. Of what happened just after 6.35 on that morning I cannot profess to have any very clear idea. We went over the parapet I remember, and forward at the double. For half an hour beforehand a rain of our shells had plastered the German trenches in front of us, and during those eternal thirty minutes we waited tense. Hugh Latimer alone of all the men I saw seemed absolutely unconscious of anything unusual. Some of the men were singing below their breath, and one I remember sucked his teeth with maddening persistency. And one and all watched me curiously, speculatively—or so it seemed to me. Then we were off, and of crossing No-Man's-Land I have no recollection. I remember a man beside me

falling with a crash and nearly tripping me up—and then, at last, the Huns. I let drive with my revolver from the range of a few inches into the fat, bloated face of a frightened-looking man in dirty grey, and as he crashed down I remember shouting, "There's the Blue Bird for you, old dear." Little things like that do stick. But everything else is just a blurred phantasmagoria in my mind. And after a while it was over. The trench was full of still grey figures, with here and there a khaki one beside them. A sapper officer forced his way through shouting for a working-party. We were the flanking company, and vital work had to be done and quick. Barricades rigged up, communication trenches which now ran to our Front blocked up, the trench made to fire the other way. For we knew there would be a counter-attack, and if you fail to consolidate what you've won you won't keep it long. It was while I slaved and sweated with the men shifting sandbags—turning the parados, or back of the trench into the new parapet, or front—that I got word that Hugh was dead. I hadn't seen him since the morning, and the rumour passed along from man to man.

"The Captain's took it. Copped it in the head. Bomb took him in the napper."

But there was no time to stop and enquire, and with my heart sick within me I worked on. One thing at

any rate; it had only been a little show, but it had been successful—the dear chap hadn't lost his life in a failure. Then I saw the doctor for a moment.

"No, he's not dead," he said, "but—he's mighty near it. You know he practically ran the show single-handed on the left flank."

"What did he do?" I cried.

"Do? Why he kept a Hun bombing-party who were working up the trench at bay for half an hour by himself, which completely saved the situation, and then went out into the open, when he was relieved, and pulled in seven men who'd been caught by a machine-gun. It was while he was getting the last one that a bomb exploded almost on his head. Why he wasn't killed on the spot, I simply can't conceive." And the doctor was gone.

But strange things happen, and the hand of Death is ever capricious. Was it not only the other day that we exploded a mine, and sailing through the air there came a Hun—a whole complete Hun. Stunned and winded he fell on the parapet of our trench, and having been pulled in and revived, at last sat up. "Goot," he murmured; "I hof long vanted to surrender. . . ."

Hugh Latimer was not dead—that was the great outstanding fact; though had I known the writing in the roll of Fate, I would have wished a thousand times

that the miracle had not happened. There are worse things than death. . . .

And now I bring the first part of my tragedy to a halt; the beginning as I called it—that part which Hugh's wife did not know. She, with all the world, saw the announcement in the paper, the announcement —bald and official of the deed for which he won his V.C. It was much as the doctor described it to me. She, with all the world, saw his name in the Casualty List as wounded; and on receipt of a telegram from the War Office, she crossed to France in fear and trembling—for the wire did not mince words; his condition was very critical. He did not know her—he was quite unconscious, and had been so for days. That night they were trephining, and there was just a hope. . . .

The next morning Hugh knew his wife.

. . . . . .

For the next three months I did not see him. The battalion was still up, and I got no chance of going down to Boulogne. He didn't stay there long, but, following the ordinary routine of the R.A.M.C., went back to England in a hospital ship, and into a home in London. Sir William Cremer, the eminent brain specialist, who had operated on him, and been particularly interested in his case, kept him under his eye for a

couple of months, and then he went to his own home to recuperate.

All this and a lot more besides I got in letters from his wife. The King himself had graciously come round and presented him with the cross—and she was simply brimming over with happiness, dear soul. He was ever so much better, and very cheerful; and Sir William was a perfect dear; and he'd actually taken out six ounces of brain during the operation, and wasn't it wonderful. Also the son and heir grew more perfect every day. Which news, needless to say, cheered me immensely.

Then came the first premonition of something wrong. For a fortnight I'd not heard from her, and then I got a letter which wasn't quite so cheerful.

". . . Hugh doesn't seem able to sleep." So ran part of it. "He is terribly restless, and at times dreadfully irritable. He doesn't seem to have any pain in his head, which is a comfort. But I'm not quite easy about him, Ginger. The other evening I was sitting opposite to him in the study, and suddenly something compelled me to look at him. I have never seen anything like the look in his eyes. He was staring at the fire, and his right hand was opening and shutting like a bird's talon. I was terrified for a moment, and then I forced myself to speak calmly.

" 'Why this ferocious expression, old boy,' I said,

with a laugh. For a moment he did not answer, but his eyes left the fire, and travelled slowly round till they met mine. I never knew what that phrase meant till then; it always struck me as a sort of author's license. But that evening I felt them coming, and I could have screamed. He gazed at me in silence and then at last he spoke.

" 'Have you ever heard of the Death Grip? Some day I'll tell you about it.' Then he looked away, and I made an excuse to go out of the room, for I was shaking with fright. It was so utterly unlike Hugh to make a silly remark like that. When I came back later, he was perfectly calm and his own self again. Moreover, he seemed to have completely forgotten the incident, because he apologised for having been asleep.

"I wanted Sir William to come down and see him; or else for us to go up to town, as I expect Sir William is far too busy. But Hugh wouldn't hear of it, and got quite angry—so I didn't press the matter. But I'm worried, Ginger. . . ."

I read this part of the letter to our doctor. We were having an omelette of huit-œufs, and une bouteille de vin rouge in a little estaminet way back, I remember; and I asked him what he thought.

"My dear fellow," he said, "frankly it's impossible to say. You know what women are; and that letter may give quite a false impression of what really took

place. You see what I mean: in her anxiety she may have exaggerated some jocular remark. She's had a very wearing time, and her own nerves are probably a bit on edge. But——" he paused and leaned back. "Encore du vin, s'il vous plaît, mam'selle. But, Ginger, it's no good pretending, there may be a very much more sinister meaning behind it all. The brain is a most complex organisation, and even such men as Cremer are only standing on the threshold of knowledge with regard to it. They know a lot—but how much more there is to learn! Latimer, as you know, owes his life practically to a miracle. Not once in a thousand times would a man escape instant death under such circumstances. A great deal of brain matter was exposed, and subsequently removed at Boulogne by Sir William, when he trephined. And it is possible that some radical alteration has taken place in Hugh Latimer's character, soul—whatever you choose to call that part of a man which controls his life—as a result of the operation. If what Mrs. Latimer says is the truth—and when I say that I mean if what she says is to be relied on as a cold, bald statement of what happened—then I am bound to say that I think the matter is very serious indeed."

"God Almighty!" I cried, "do you mean to say that you think there is a chance of Hugh going mad?"

"To be perfectly frank, I do; always granted that

that letter is reliable. I consider it vital that whether he wishes to or whether he doesn't, Sir William Cremer should be consulted. And—*at once.*" The doctor emphasised his words with his fist on the table.

"Great Scott! Doc," I muttered. "Do you really think there is danger?"

"I don't know enough of the case to say that. But I do know something about the brain, enough to say that there might be not only danger, but hideous danger, to everyone in the house." He was silent for a bit and then rapped out. "Does Mrs. Latimer share the same room as her husband?"

"I really don't know," I answered. "I imagine so."

"Well, I don't know how well you know her; but until Sir William gives a definite opinion, if I knew her well enough, I would strongly advise her to sleep in another room—*and lock the door.*"

"Good God! you think . . ."

"Look here, Ginger, what's the good of beating about the bush. It is possible—I won't say probable—that Hugh Latimer is on the road to becoming a homicidal maniac. And if, by any chance, that assumption is correct, the most hideous tragedy might happen at any moment. Mam'selle, l'addition s'il vous plait. You're going on leave shortly, aren't you?"

"In two days," I answered.

"Well, go down and see for yourself; it won't re-

quire a doctor to notice the symptoms. And if what I fear is correct, track out Cremer in his lair—find him somehow and find him quickly."

We walked up the road together, and my glance fell on the plot of ground on the right, covered so thickly with little wooden crosses. As I looked away the doctor's eyes and mine met. And there was the same thought in both our minds.

. . . . .

Three days later I was in Hugh's house. His wife met me at the station, and before we got into the car my heart sank. I knew something was wrong.

"How is he?" I asked, as we swung out of the gates.

"Oh! Ginger," she said. "I'm frightened—frightened to death."

"What is it, lady," I cried. "Has he been looking at you like that again, the way you described in the letter?"

"Yes—it's getting more frequent. And at nights—oh! my God! it's awful. Poor old Hugh."

She broke down at that, while I noticed that her hands were all trembling, and that dark shadows were round her eyes.

"Tell me about it," I said, "for we must do something."

She pulled herself together, and called through the

speaking-tube to the chauffeur. "Go a little way round, Jervis. I don't want to get in till tea-time."

Then she turned to me. "Since his operation I've been using another room." The doctor's words flashed into my mind. "Sir William thought it essential that he should have really long undisturbed nights, and I'm such a light sleeper. For a few weeks everything panned out splendidly. He seemed to get better and stronger, and he was just the same dear old Hugh he's always been. Then gradually the restlessness started; he couldn't sleep, he became irritable,—and the one thing which made him most irritable of all was any suggestion that he wasn't going on all right; or any hint even that he should see a doctor. Then came the incident I wrote to you about. Since that evening I've often caught the same look in his eye." She shuddered, and again I noticed the quiver in her hands, but she quickly controlled herself. "Last night, I woke up suddenly. It must have been about three, for it was pitch dark, and I think I'd been asleep some hours. I don't know what woke me; but in an instant I knew there was someone in the room. I lay trembling with fright, and suddenly out of the darkness came a hideous chuckle. It was the most awful, diabolical noise I've ever heard. Then I heard his voice.

"He was muttering, and all I could catch were the

words 'Death-Grip.' I nearly fainted with terror, but forced myself to keep consciousness. How long he stood there I don't know, but after an eternity it seemed, I heard the door open and shut. I heard him cross the passage, and go into his own room. Then there was silence. I forced myself to move; I switched on the light, and locked the door. And when dawn came in through the windows, I was still sitting in a chair sobbing, shaking like a terrified child.

"This morning he was perfectly normal, and just as cheerful and loving as he'd ever been. Oh! Ginger, what am I to do?" She broke down and cried helplessly.

"You poor kid," I said; "what an awful experience! You must lock your door to-night, and to-morrow, with or without Hugh's knowledge, I shall go up to see Cremer."

"You don't think; oh! it couldn't be true that Hugh, my Hugh, is going——" She wouldn't say the word, but just gazed at me fearfully through her tears.

"Hush, my lady," I said quietly. "The brain is a funny thing; perhaps there is some pressure somewhere which Sir William will be able to remove."

"Why, of course that's it. I'm tired, stupid—it's made me exaggerate things. It will mean another operation, that's all. Wasn't it splendid about his getting the V.C.; and the King, so gracious, so

kind. . . ." She talked bravely on, and I tried to help her.

But suppose there wasn't any pressure; suppose there was nothing to remove; suppose. . . . And in my mind I saw the plot with the little wooden crosses; in my mind I heard the express for somewhere booming sullenly overhead. And I wondered . . . shuddered.

. . . . . .

Hugh met us at the door; dear old Hugh, looking as well as he ever did.

"Splendid, Ginger, old man! So glad you managed the leave all right."

"Not a hitch, Hugh. You're looking very fit."

"I am. Fit as a flea. You ask Elsie what she thinks."

His wife smiled. "You're just wonderful, old boy, except for your sleeplessness at night. I want him to see Sir William Cremer, Ginger, but he doesn't think it worth while."

"I don't," said Hugh shortly. "Damn that old sawbones."

In another man the remark would have passed unnoticed; but the chauffeur was there, and a maid, and his wife—and the expression was quite foreign to Hugh.

But I am bound to say that except for that one

trifling thing I noticed absolutely nothing peculiar about him all the evening. At dinner he was perfectly normal; quite charming—his own brilliant self. When he was in the mood, I have seldom heard his equal as a conversationalist, and that night he was at the top of his form. I almost managed to persuade myself that my fears were groundless. . . .

"I want to have a buck with Ginger, dear," he said to his wife after dinner was over. "A talk over the smells and joys of Flanders."

"But I should like to hear," she answered. "It's so hard to get you men to talk."

"I don't think you would like to hear, my dear." His tone was quite normal, but there was a strange note of insistence in it. "It's shop, and will bore you dreadfully." He still stood by the door waiting for her to pass through. After a moment's hesitation she went, and Hugh closed the door after her. What suggested the analogy to my mind I cannot say, but the way in which he performed the simple act of closing the door seemed to be the opening rite of some ceremony. Thus could I picture a morphomaniac shutting himself in from prying gaze, before abandoning himself to his vice; the drunkard, at last alone, returning gloatingly to his bottle. Perhaps my perceptions were quickened, but it seemed to me that Hugh came back to me as if I were his colleague in some

guilty secret—as if his wife were alien to his thoughts, and now that she was gone, we could talk. . . . His first words proved I was right.

"Now we can talk, Ginger," he remarked. "These women don't understand." He pushed the port towards me.

"Understand what?" I was watching him closely.

"Life, my boy, *the* life. The life of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Gad! it was a great day that, Ginger." His eyes were fixed on me, and for the first time I noticed the red in them, and a peculiar twitch in the lids.

"Did you find the Blue Bird?" I asked quietly.

"Find it?" He laughed—and it was not a pleasant laugh. "I used to think it lay in books, in art, in music." Again he gave way to a fit of devilish mirth. "What damned fools we are, old man, what damned fools. But you mustn't tell her." He leaned over the table and spoke confidentially. "She'd never understand; that's why I got rid of her." He lifted his glass to the light, looking at it as a connoisseur looks at a rare vintage, while all the time a strange smile—a cruel smile—hovered round his lips. "Music—art," his voice was full of scorn. "Only we know better. Did I ever tell you about that grip I learned in Sumatra—the Death Grip?"

He suddenly fired the question at me, and for a

moment I did not answer. All my fears were rushing back into my mind with renewed strength; it was not so much the question as the tone—and the eyes of the speaker.

"No, never." I lit a cigarette with elaborate care.

"Ah! Someday I must show you. You take a man's throat in your right hand, and you put your left behind his neck—like that." His hands were curved in front of him—curved as if a man's throat was in them. "Then you press and press with the two thumbs—like that; with the right thumb on a certain muscle in the neck, and the left on an artery under the ear; and you go on pressing, until—until there's no need to press any longer. It's wonderful." I can't hope to give any idea of the dreadful gloating tone in his voice.

"I got a Prussian officer like that, that day," he went on after a moment. "I saw his dirty grey face close to mine, and I got my hands on his throat. I'd forgotten the exact position for the grip, and then suddenly I remembered it. I squeezed and squeezed —and, Ginger, the grip was right. I squeezed his life out in ten seconds." His voice rose to a shout.

"Steady, Hugh," I cried. "You'll be frightening Elsie."

"Quite right," he answered; "that would never do. I haven't told her that little incident—she

wouldn't understand. But I'm going to show her the grip one of these days. As a soldier's wife, I think it's a thing she ought to know."

He relapsed into silence, apparently quite calm, though his eyelids still twitched, while I watched him covertly from time to time. In my mind now there was no shadow of doubt that the doctor's fears were justified; I knew that Hugh Latimer was insane. That his loss of mental balance was periodical and not permanent was not the point; layman though I was, I could realise the danger to everyone in the house. At the moment the tragedy of the case hardly struck me; I could only think of the look on his face, the gloating, watching look—and Elsie and the boy. . . .

At half-past nine he went to bed, and I had a few words with his wife.

"Lock your door to-night," I said insistently, "as you value everything, lock your door. I am going to see Cremer to-morrow."

"What's he been saying?" she asked, and her lips were white. "I heard him shouting once."

"Enough to make me tell you to lock your door," I said as lightly as I could. "Elsie, you've got to be brave; something has gone wrong with poor old Hugh for the time, and until he's put right again, there are moments when he's not responsible for his actions. Don't be uneasy; I shall be on hand to-night."

"I shan't be uneasy," she answered, and then she turned away, and I saw her shoulders shaking. "My Hugh—my poor old man." I caught the whispered words, and she was gone.

. . . . .

I suppose it was about two that I woke with a start. I had meant to keep awake the whole night, and with that idea I had not undressed, but, sitting in a chair before the fire, had tried to keep myself awake with a book. But the journey from France had made me sleepy, and the book had slipped to the floor, as has been known to happen before. The light was still on, though the fire had burned low; and I was cramped and stiff. For a moment I sat listening intently—every faculty awake; and then I heard a door gently close, and a step in the passage. I switched off the light and listened.

Instinctively, I knew the crisis had come, and with the need for action I became perfectly cool. Soft footsteps, like a man walking in his socks, came distinctly through the door which I had left ajar—once a board creaked. And after that sharp ominous crack there was silence for a space; the nocturnal walker was cautious, cautious with the devilish cunning of the madman.

It seemed to me an eternity as I listened—straining to hear in the silent house—then once again there

came the soft pad-pad of stockinged feet; nearer and nearer till they halted outside my door. I could hear the heavy breathing of someone outside, and then stealthily my door was pushed open. In the dim light which filtered in from the passage Hugh's figure was framed in the doorway. With many pauses and very cautious steps he moved to the bed, while I pressed against the wall watching him.

His hands wandered over the pillows, and then he muttered to himself. "Old Ginger—I suppose he hasn't come to bed yet. And I wanted to show him that little grip—that little death-grip." He chuckled horribly. "Never mind—Elsie, dear little Elsie; I will show her first. Though she won't understand so well—only Ginger would really understand."

He moved to the door, and once again the slow padding of his feet sounded in the passage; while he still muttered, though I could not hear what he said. Then he came to his wife's door and cautiously turned the handle. . . .

What happened then happened quickly. He realised quickly that it was locked, and this seemed to infuriate him. He gave an inarticulate shout, and rattled the door violently; then he drew back to the other side of the passage and prepared to charge it. And at that moment we closed.

I had followed him out of my room, and, knowing

myself to be far stronger than him, I threw myself on him without a thought. I hadn't reckoned on the strength of a madman, and for two minutes he threw me about as if I were a child. We struggled and fought, while frightened maids wrung their hands—and a white-faced woman watched with tearless eyes. And at last I won; when his temporary strength gave out, he was as weak as a child. Poor old Hugh! Poor old chap! . . .

. . . . . .

Sir William Cremer came down the next day, and to him I told everything. He made all the necessary wretched arrangements, and the dear fellow was taken away—seemingly quite sane—and telling Elsie he'd be back soon.

"They say I need a change, old dear, and this old tyrant says I've been restless at night." He had his hand on Sir William's shoulder as he spoke, while the car was waiting at the door.

"Jove! little girl—you do look a bit washed out. Have I been worrying you?"

"Of course not, old man." Her voice was perfectly steady.

"There you are, Sir William." He turned triumphantly to the doctor. "Still perhaps you're right. Where's the young rascal? Give me a kiss, you scamp—and look after your mother while I'm away. I'll

be back soon." He went down the steps and into the car.

"And very likely he will, Mrs. Latimer. Keep your spirits up and never despair." Sir William patted her shoulder paternally, but over her bent head I saw his eyes.

"God knows," he said reverently to me as he followed Hugh. "The brain is such a wonderful thing; just a tiny speck and a genius becomes a madman. God knows."

. . . . .

Later on I too went away, carrying in my mind the picture of a girl—she was no more—holding a little bronze cross in front of a laughing baby—the cross on which is written, "For Valour." And once again my mind went back to that little plot in Flanders covered with wooden crosses.

[redacted]

CHAPTER VIII

JAMES HENRY

JAMES HENRY was the sole remaining son of his mother, and she was a widow. His father, some twelve months previously, had inadvertently encountered a motor-car travelling at great speed, and had forthwith been laid to rest. His sisters—whom James Henry affected to despise—had long since left the parental roof and gone to seek their Fortunes in the great world; while his brothers had in all cases died violent deaths, following in the steps of their lamented father. In fact, as I said, James Henry was alone in the world saving only for his mother: and as she'd married again since his father's death he felt that his responsibility so far as she was concerned was at an end. In fact, he frequently cut her when he met her about the house.

Relations had become particularly strained after this second matrimonial venture. An aristocrat of the most unbending description himself, he had been away during the period of her courtship—otherwise, no doubt, he would have protected his father's stainless

escutcheon. As it was, he never quite recovered from the shock.

It was at breakfast one morning that he heard the news. Lady Monica told him as she handed him his tea. "James Henry," she remarked reproachfully, "your mother is a naughty woman." True to his aristocratic principle of stoical calm he continued to consume his morning beverage. There were times when the mention of his mother bored him to extinction. "A very naughty woman," she continued. "Dad"—she addressed a man who had just come into the room—"it's occurred."

"What—have they come?"

"Yes—last night. Five."

"Are they good ones?"

Lady Alice laughed. "I was just telling James Henry what I thought of his Family when you came in. I'm afraid Harriet Emily is incorrigible."

"Look at James!" exclaimed the Earl—"he's spilled his tea all over the carpet." He was inspecting the dishes on the sideboard as he spoke.

"He always does. His whiskers dribble. Jervis tells me that he thinks Harriet Emily must have—er—flirted with a most undesirable acquaintance."

"Oh! has she?" Her father opened the morning paper and started to enjoy his breakfast. "We must drown 'em, my dear, drown—— Hullo! the Russians

have crossed the ——" It sounded like an explosion in a soda-water factory, and James Henry protested.

"Quite right, Henry. He oughtn't to do it at breakfast. It doesn't really make any one any happier. Did *you* know about your mother? Now don't gobble your food." Lady Monica held up an admonishing finger. "Four of your brothers and sisters are more or less respectable, James, but there's *one*—there's one that is distinctly reminiscent of a dachshund. Oh! 'Arriet, 'Arriet—I'm ashamed of you."

James Henry sneezed heavily and got down from the table. Always a perfect gentleman, he picked up the crumbs round his chair, and even went so far as to salvage a large piece of sausage skin which had slipped on to the floor. Then, full of rectitude and outwardly unconcerned, he retired to a corner behind a cupboard and earnestly contemplated a little hole in the floor.

Outwardly calm—yes: that at least was due to the memory of his blue-blooded father. But inwardly, he seethed. With his head on one side he alternately sniffed and blew as he had done regularly every morning for the past two months. His father's wife the mother of a sausage-dog! Incredible! It must have been that miserable fat beast who lived at the Pig and Whistle. The insolence—the inconceivable impertinence of such an unsightly, corpulent traducer daring to ally himself with One of the Fox Terriers. He

growled slightly in his disgust, and three mice inside the wall laughed gently. But—still, the girls are ever frail. He blushed slightly at some recollection, and realised that he must make allowances. But a sausage dog! Great Heavens!

"James—avançons, mon brave." Lady Monica was standing in the window. "We will hie us to the village. Dad, don't forget that our branch of the Federated Association of Women War Workers are drilling here this afternoon."

"Good Heavens! my dear girl—is it?" Her father gazed at her in alarm. "I think—er—I think I shall have to—er—run up to Town—er—this afternoon."

"I thought you'd have to, old dear. In fact, I've ordered the car for you. Come along, Henry—we must go and get a boy scout to be bandaged."

James Henry gave one last violently facial contortion at the entrance of the mouse's lair, and rose majestically to his feet. If she wanted to go out, he fully realised that he must go with her: Emily would have to wait. He would go round later and see his poor misguided mother and reason with her; but just at present the girl was his principal duty. She generally asked his advice on various things when they went for a walk, and the least he could do was to pretend to be interested at any rate.

Apparently this morning she was in need of much

counsel and help. Having arrived at a clearing in the wood, on the way to the village, she sat down on the fallen trunk of a tree, and addressed him.

"James—what am I to do? Derek is coming this afternoon before he goes back to France. What shall I tell him, Henry—what *shall* I tell him? Because I know he'll ask me again. Thank you, old man, but you're not very helpful, and I'd much sooner you kept it yourself."

Disgustedly James Henry removed the carcase of a field mouse he had just procured, and resigned himself to the inevitable.

"I'm fond of him; I like him—in fact at times more than like him. But is it the *real* thing? Now what do you think, James Henry?—tell me all that is in your mind. Ought I——"

It was then that he gave his celebrated rendering of a young typhoon, owing to the presence of a foreign substance—to wit, a fly—in a ticklish spot on his nose.

"You think that, do you? Well, perhaps you're right. Come on, my lad, we must obtain the victim for this afternoon. I wonder if those little boys like it? To do some good and kindly action each day—that's their motto, James. And as one person to another you must admit that to be revived from drowning, resuscitated from fainting, brought to from an epileptic fit, and have two knees, an ankle, and a collar-

bone set at the same time is some good action even for a boy scout.

. . . . .

It was not until after lunch that James Henry paid his promised call on his mother. Maturer considerations had but strengthened his resolve to make allowances. After all, these things do happen in the best families. He was, indeed, prepared to be magnanimous and forgive; he was even prepared to be interested; the only thing he wasn't prepared for was the nasty bite he got on his ear. That settled it. It was then that he finally washed his hands of his undutiful parent. As he told her, he felt more sorrow than anger; he should have realised that anyone who could have dealings with a sausage-hound must be dead to all sense of decency—and that the only thing he asked was that in the future she would conceal the fact that they were related.

Then he left her—and trotting round to the front of the house, found great activity in progress on the lawn.

"Good Heavens! James Henry, do they often do this?" With a shout of joy he recognised the speaker. And having told him about Harriet, and blown heavily at a passing spider and then trodden on it, he sat down beside the soldier on the steps. The game on the lawn at first sight looked dull; and he only fa-

voured it with a perfunctory glance. In fact, what on earth there was in it to make the soldier beside him shake and shake while the tears periodically rolled down his face was quite beyond Henry.

The principal player seemed to be a large man—also in khaki—with a loud voice. Up to date he had said nothing but "Now then, ladies," at intervals, and in a rising crescendo. Then it all became complicated.

"Now then, ladies, when I says Number—you numbers from Right to Left in an heven tone of voice. The third lady from the left 'as no lady behind 'er—seeing as we're a hodd number. She forms the blank file. Yes, you, mum—you, I means."

"What are you pointing at me for, my good man?" The Vicar's wife suddenly realised she was being spoken to. "Am I doing anything wrong?"

"No, mum, no. Not this time. I was only saying as you 'ave no one behind you."

"Oh! I'll go there at once—I'm so sorry." She retired to the rear rank. "Dear Mrs. Goodenough, *did* I tread upon your foot?—so clumsy of me! Oh, what is that man saying now? But you've just told me to come here. You did nothing of the sort? How rude!"

But as I said, the game did not interest James Henry, so he wandered away and played in some bushes. There were distinct traces of a recently mov-

ing mole which was far more to the point. Then having found—after a diligent search and much delight in pungent odours—that the mole was a has-been, our Henry disappeared for a space. And far be it from me to disclose where he went: his intentions were always strictly honourable.

When he appeared again the Earl had just returned from London, and was talking to the tall soldier-man. The Women War Workers had departed, and, as James Henry approached, his mistress came out and joined the two men.

"Have those dreadful women gone, my dear?" asked the Earl as he saw her.

"You're very rude, Dad. The Federated Association of the W.W.W. is a very fine body of patriotic women. What did you think of our drill, Derek?"

"Wonderful, Monica. Quite the most wonderful thing I've ever seen." The soldier solemnly offered her a cigarette.

"You men are all jealous. We're coming out to France as V.A.D.'s soon."

"Good Lord, Derek—you ought to have seen their first drill. In one corner of the lawn that poor devil of a sergeant with his face a shiny purple alternately sobbed and bellowed like a bull—while twenty-seven W.W.W.'s tied themselves into a knot like a Rugby football scrum, and told one another how they'd done

it. It was the most heart-rending sight I've ever seen."

"Dear old Dad!" The girl blew a cloud of smoke. "You told it better last time."

"Don't interrupt, Monica. The final tableau——"

"Which one are you going to tell him, dear? The one where James Henry bit the Vicar's wife in the leg, or the one where the sergeant with a choking cry of 'Double, damn you!' fell fainting into the rhododendron bush?"

"I think the second is the better," remarked the soldier pensively. "Dogs always bite the Vicar's wife's leg. Not a hobby I should personally take up, but——"

They all laughed. "Now run indoors, old 'un, and tell John to get you a mixed Vermouth—I want to talk to Derek." The girl gently pushed her father towards the open window.

It was at that particular moment in James Henry's career that, having snapped at a wasp and partially killed it, he inadvertently sat on the carcase by mistake. As he explained to Harriet Emily afterwards, it wasn't so much the discomfort of the proceeding which annoyed him, as the unfeeling laughter of the spectators. And it was only when she'd bitten him in the other ear that he remembered he had disowned her that very afternoon.

. . . . .

But elsewhere, though he was quite unaware of the fact, momentous decisions as to his future were being taken. The Earl had gone in to get his mixed Vermouth, and outside his daughter and the soldier-man sat and talked. It was fragmentary, disjointed—the talk of old friends with much in common. Only in the man's voice there was that suppressed note which indicates things more than any mere words. Monica heard it and sighed—she'd heard it so often before in his voice. James Henry had heard it too during a previous talk—one which he had graced with his presence—and had gone to the extent of discussing it with a friend. On this occasion he had been gently dozing on the man's knee, when suddenly he had been rudely awakened. In his dreams he had heard her say, "Dear old Derek—I'm afraid it's No. You see, I'm not sure;" which didn't seem much to make a disturbance about.

"Would you believe it," he remarked later, "but as she spoke the soldier-man's grip tightened on my neck till I was almost choked."

"What did you do?" asked his Friend, a disreputable "long-dog." "Did you bite him?"

"I did not." James Henry sniffed. "It was not a biting moment. Tact was required. I just gave a little cough, and instantly he took his hand away. 'Old man,' he whispered to me—she'd left us—'I'm

sorry. I didn't mean to—I wasn't thinking.' So I licked his hand to show him I understood."

"I know what you mean. I'm generally there when my bloke comes out of prison, and he always kicks me. But it's meant kindly."

"As a matter of fact that is not what I mean—though I daresay your experiences on such matters are profound." James was becoming blue-blooded. "The person who owns you, and who is in the habit of going to—er—prison, no doubt shows his affection for you in that way. And very suitable too. But the affair to which I alluded is quite different. The soldier-man is almost as much in my care as the girl. And so I know his feelings. At the time, he was suffering though why I don't understand; and therefore it was up to me to suffer with him. It helped him."

"H'm," the lurcher grunted. "Daresay you're right. What about a trip to the gorse? I haven't seen a rabbit for some time."

And if Henry had not sat on the wasp, his neck might again have been squeezed that evening. As it was, the danger period was over by the time he reappeared and jumped into the girl's lap. Not only had the sixth proposal been gently turned down—but James's plans for the near future had been settled for him in a most arbitrary manner.

"Well, old man, how's the tail?" laughed the soldier. James Henry yawned—the subject seemed a trifle personal even amongst old friends. "Have you heard you're coming with me to France?"

"And you must bring him to me as soon as I get over," cried the girl.

"At once, dear lady. I'll ask for special leave, and if necessary an armistice."

"Won't you bark at the Huns, my cherub?" She laughed and got up. "Go to your uncle—I'm going to dress."

What happened then was almost more than even the most long-suffering terrier could stand. He was unceremoniously bundled into his uncle's arms by his mistress, and at the same moment she bent down. A strange noise was heard such as he had frequently noted, coming from the top of his own head, when his mistress was in an affectionate mood—a peculiar form of exercise he deduced, which apparently amused some people. But the effect on the soldier was electrical. He sprang out of his chair with a shout—"Monica—you little devil—come back," and James Henry fell winded to the floor. But a flutter of white disappearing indoors was the only answer. . . .

"She's not sure, James, my son—she's not sure." The man pulled out his cigarette case and contemplated him thoughtfully. "And how the deuce are

we to make her sure? I want it, and her father wants it, and so does she if she only knew it. They're the devil, James Henry—they're the devil."

But his hearer did not want philosophy; he wanted his tummy rubbed. He lay with one eye closed, his four paws turned up limply towards the sky, and sighed gently. Never before had the suggestion failed; enthusiastic admirers had always taken the hint gladly, and he had graciously allowed them the pleasure. But this time—horror upon horror—not only was there no result, but in a dreamy, contemplative manner the soldier actually deposited his used and still warm match carefully on the spot where James Henry's wind had been. Naturally there was only one possible course open to him. He rose quietly, and left. It was only when he was thinking the matter over later that it struck him that his exit would have been more dignified if he hadn't sat down halfway across the lawn to scratch his right ear. It was more than likely that a completely false construction would be put on that simple action by anyone who didn't know he'd had words with Harriet Emily.

. . . . .

Thus James Henry—gentleman, at his country seat in England. I have gone out of my way to describe what may be taken as an average day in his life, in order to show him as he was before he went to France

to be banished from the country—cashiered in disgrace a few weeks after his arrival. Which only goes to prove the change that war causes in even the most polished and courtly.

I am told that the alteration for the worse started shortly after his arrival at the front. What did it I don't know—but he lost one whisker and a portion of an ear, thus giving him a somewhat lopsided appearance; though rakish withal. It may have been a detonator which went off as he ate it—it may have been foolish curiosity over a maxim—it may even have been due to the fact that he found a motor-bicycle standing still, what time it made strange provocative noises, and failed to notice that the back wheel was off the ground and rotating at a great pace.

Whatever it was it altered James Henry. Not that it soured his temper—not at all; but it made him more reckless, less careful of appearances. He forgot the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, and a series of incidents occurred which tended to strain relations all round.

There was the question of the three dead chickens, for instance. Had they disappeared decently and in order much might have been thought but nothing would have been known. But when they were deposited on their owner's doorstep, with James Henry mounting guard over the corpses himself, it was a

little difficult to explain the matter away. That was the trouble—his sense of humour seemed to have become distorted.

The pastime of hunting for rats in the sewers of Ypres cannot be too highly commended; but having got thoroughly wet in the process, James Henry's practice of depositing the rat and himself on the Adjutant's bed was open to grave criticism.

But enough: these two instances were, I am sorry to state, but types of countless other regrettable episodes which caused the popularity of James Henry to wane.

The final decree of death or banishment came when James had been in the country some seven weeks.

On the day in question a dreadful shout was heard, followed by a flood of language which I will refrain from committing to print. And then the Colonel appeared in the door of his dug-out.

"Where is that accursed idiot, Murgatroyd? Pass the word along for the damn fool."

"'Urry up, Conky. The ole man's a-twittering for you." Murgatroyd emerged from a recess.

"What's 'e want?"

"I'd go and find out, cully. I think 'e's going to mention you in 'is will." At that moment a fresh outburst floated through the stillness.

"Great 'Eavens!" Murgatroyd reluctantly rose to

his feet. "So long, boys. Tell me mother she was in me thoughts up to the end." He paused outside the dug-out and then went manfully in. "You wanted me, sir."

"Look at this, you blithering ass, look at this." The Colonel was searching through his Fortnum and Mason packing-case on the floor. "Great Heavens! and the caviar too—imbedded in the butter. Five defunct rodents in the brawn"—he threw each in turn at his servant, who dodged round the dug-out like a pea in a drum—"the marmalade and the pâté de fois gras inseparably mixed together, and the whole covered with a thick layer of disintegrating cigar."

"It wasn't me, sir," Murgatroyd spoke in an aggrieved tone.

"I didn't suppose it was, you fool." The Colonel straightened himself and glared at his hapless minion. "Great Heavens! there's another rat on my hair-brush."

"One of the same five, sir. It ricocheted off my face." With a magnificent nonchalance his servant threw it out of the door. "I think, sir, it must be James 'Enry."

"Who the devil is James Henry?"

"Sir Derek Temple's little dawg, sir."

"Indeed." The Colonel's tone was ominous. "Go

round and ask Sir Derek Temple to be good enough to come and see me at once."

What happened exactly at that interview I cannot say; although I understand that James Henry considered an absurd fuss had been made about a trifle. In fact he found it so difficult to lie down with any comfort that night that he missed much of his master's conversation with him.

"You've topped it, James, you've put the brass hat on. The old man threatens to turn out a firing party if he ever sees you again."

James feigned sleep: this continual harping on what was over and done with he considered the very worst of form. Even if he had put the caviar in the butter and his foot in the marmalade—well, hang it all—what then? He'd presented the old buster with five dead rats, which was more than he'd do for a lot of people.

"In fact, James, you are not popular, my boy—and I shudder to think what Monica will do with you when she gets you. She's come over, you may be pleased to hear, Henry. She is V.A.D.-ing at a charming hospital that overlooks the sea. James, why can't I go sick—and live for a space at that charming hospital that overlooks the sea? Think of it: here am I, panting to have my face washed by her, panting——" For a moment he rhapsodised in silence. "Breakfast

in bed, poached egg in the bed: oh! James, my boy, and she probably never even thinks of me."

He took a letter out of his pocket and held it under the light of the candle. "'Not much to do at present, but delightful weather. The hospital is nearly empty, though there's one perfect dear who is almost fit—a Major in some Highland regiment.'

"Listen to that, James. Some great raw-boned, red-kneed Scotchman, and she calls him a perfect dear!" His listener blew resignedly and again composed himself to slumber.

"'How is James behaving? I'd love to see the sweet pet again.' Sweet pet: yes—my boy—you look it. 'Do you remember how annoyed he was when I put him in your arms that afternoon at home?' Do you hear that, James?—do I remember? Monica, you adorable soul. . . ." He relapsed into moody thought.

. . . . . .

At what moment during that restless night the idea actually came I know not. Possibly a diabolical chuckle on the part of James Henry, who was hunting in his dreams, goaded him to desperation. But it is an undoubted fact that when Sir Derek Temple rose the next morning he had definitely determined to embark on the adventure which culminated in the tragedy of the cat, the General, and James. The latter is reputed

to regard the affair as quite trifling and unworthy of the fierce glare of publicity that beat upon it. The cat, has, or rather had, different views.

Now, be it known to those who live in England that it is one thing to say in an airy manner, as Derek had said to Lady Monica, that he would come and see her when she landed in France; it is another to do it. But to a determined and unprincipled man nothing is impossible; and though it would be the height of indiscretion for me to hint even at the methods he used to attain his ends, it is a certain fact that in the afternoon of the second day following the episode of the five rodents he found himself at a certain seaport town with James Henry as the other member of the party. And having had his hair cut, and extricated his companion from a street brawl, he hired a motor and drove into the country.

Now, Derek Temple's knowledge of hospitals and their ways was not profound. He had a hazy idea that on arriving at the portals he would send in his name, and that in due course he could consume a tête-à-tête tea with Monica in her private boudoir. He rehearsed the scene in his mind: the quiet, cutting reference to Highlanders who failed to understand the official position of nurses—the certainty that this particular one was a scoundrel: the fact that, on receiving her letter, he had at once rushed off to protect her.

And as he got to this point the car turned into the gates of a palatial hotel and stopped by the door. James Henry jumped through the open window, and his master followed him up the steps.

"Is Lady Monica Travers at home; I mean—er—is she in the hospital?" He addressed an R.A.M.C. sergeant in the entrance.

"No dawgs allowed in the 'ospital, sir." The scandalised N.C.O. glared at James Henry, who was furiously growling at a hot-air grating in the floor. "You must get 'im out at once, sir: we're being inspected to-day."

"Heel, James, heel. He'll be quite all right, Sergeant. Just find out, will you, about Lady Monica Travers?"

"Beg pardon, sir, but are you a patient?"

"Patient—of course I'm not a patient. Do I look like a patient?"

"Well, sir, there ain't no visiting allowed when the sisters is on duty."

"What? But it's preposterous. Do you mean to say I can't see her unless I'm a patient? Why, man, I've got to go back in an hour."

"Very sorry, sir—but no visiting allowed. Very strict 'ere, and as I says we're full of brass 'ats to-day."

For a moment Derek was nonplussed; this was a complication on which he had not reckoned.

"But look here, Sergeant, you know . . ." and even as he spoke he looked upstairs and beheld Lady Monica. Unfortunately she had not seen him, and the situation was desperate. Forcing James Henry into the arms of the outraged N.C.O., he rushed up the stairs and followed her.

"Derek!" The girl stopped in amazement. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"Monica, my dear, I've come to see you. Tell me that you don't really love that damn Scotchman."

An adorable smile spread over her face. "You idiot! I don't love anyone. My work fills my life."

"Rot! You said in your letter you had nothing to do at present. Monica, take me somewhere where I can make love to you."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. In the first place you aren't allowed here at all; and in the second I don't want to be made love to."

"And in the third," said Derek grimly, as the sound of a procession advancing down a corridor came from round the corner, "you're being inspected to-day, and that—if I mistake not—is the great pan-jan-drum himself."

"Oh! good Heavens. Derek, I'd forgotten. Do go, for goodness' sake. Run—I shall be sacked."

"I shall not go. As the great man himself rounds that corner I shall kiss you with a loud trumpeting noise."

"You brute! Oh! what shall I do?—there they are. Come in here." She grabbed him by the wrist and dragged him into a small deserted sitting-room close by.

"You darling," he remarked and promptly kissed her. "Monica, dear, you must listen——"

"Sit down, you idiot. I'm sure they saw me. You must pretend you're a patient just come in. I know I shall be sacked. The General is dreadfully particular. Put this thermometer in your mouth. Quick, give me your hand—I must take your pulse."

"I think," said a voice outside the door, "that I saw—er—a patient being brought into one of these rooms."

"Surely not, sir. These rooms are all empty." The door opened and the cavalcade paused. "Er—Lady Monica . . . really."

"A new patient, Colonel," she remarked. "I am just taking his temperature." Derek, his eyes partially closed, lay back in a chair, occasionally uttering a slight groan.

"The case looks most interesting." The General came and stood beside him. "Most interesting. Have

you—er—diagnosed the symptoms, sister?" His lips were twitching suspiciously.

"Not yet, General. The pulse is normal—and the temperature"—she looked at the thermometer—"is—good gracious me! have you kept it properly under your tongue?" She turned to Derek, who nodded feebly. "The temperature is only 93." She looked at the group in an awestruck manner.

"Most remarkable," murmured the General. "One feels compelled to wonder what it would have been if he'd had the right end in his mouth." Derek emitted a hollow groan. "And where do you feel it worst, my dear boy?" continued the great man, gazing at him through his eyeglass.

"Dyspepsia, sir," he whispered feebly. "Dreadful dyspepsia. I can't sleep, I—er—Good Lord!" His eyes opened, his voice rose, and with a fixed stare of horror he gazed at the door. Through it with due solemnity came James Henry holding in his mouth a furless and very dead cat. He advanced to the centre of the group—laid it at the General's feet—and having sneezed twice sat down and contemplated his handiwork: his tail thumping the floor feverishly in anticipation of well-merited applause.

It was possibly foolish, but, as Derek explained afterwards to Monica, the situation had passed beyond him. He arose and confronted the General, who was

surveying the scene coldly, and with a courtly exclamation of "Your cat, I believe, sir," he passed from the room.

. . . . .

The conclusion of this dreadful drama may be given in three short sentences.

The first was spoken by the General. "Let it be buried." And it was so.

The second was whispered by Lady Monica—later. "Darling, I had to *say* we were engaged: it looked so peculiar." And it was even more so.

The third was snorted by James Henry. "First I'm beaten and then I'm kissed. Damn all cats!"

PART TWO

THE LAND OF TOPSY TURVY

PART TWO

THE LAND OF TOPSY TURVY

CHAPTER I

THE GREY HOUSE

YOU come on it unexpectedly, round a little spur in the side of the valley, which screens it from view. It stands below you as you first see it, not a big house, not a little one, but just comfortable. It seems in keeping with the gardens, the tennis courts, the orchards which lie around it in a hap-hazard sort of manner, as if they had just grown there years and years ago and had been too lazy to move ever since. Peace is the keynote of the whole picture—the peace and contentment of sleepy unwoken England.

Down in the valley below, the river, brown and swollen, carries on its bosom the flotsam and jetsam of its pilgrimage through the country. Now and then a great branch goes bobbing by, only to come to grief in the shallows round the corner—the shallows where the noise of the water on the rounded stones lulls one

to sleep at night, and sounds a ceaseless reveille each morning. On the other side of the water the woods stretch down close to the bank, though the upper slopes of the hills are bare, and bathed in the golden light of the dying winter sun. Slowly the dark shadow line creeps up—creeps up to meet the shepherd coming home with his flock. Faint, but crisp, the barks of his dog, prancing excitedly round him, strike on one's ears, and then of a sudden—silence. They have entered the purple country; they have left the golden land, and the dog trots soberly at his master's heels. One last peak alone remains, dipped in flaming yellow, and then that too is touched by the finger of oncoming night. For a few moments it survives, a flicker of fire on its rugged tip, and then—the end; like a grim black sentinel it stands gloomy and sinister against the evening sky.

The shepherd is out of sight amongst the trees; the purple is changing to grey, the grey to black; there is no movement saving only the tireless swish of the river. . . .

To the man leaning over the gate the scene was familiar—but familiarity had not robbed it of its charm. Involuntarily his mind went back to the days before the Madness came—to the days when others had stood beside him watching those same darkening hills, with the smoke of their pipes curling gently

away in the still air. Back from a day's shooting, back from an afternoon on the river, and a rest at the top of the hill before going in to tea in the house below. So had he stood countless times in the past—with those others. . . .

The Rabbit, with a gun under his arm, and his stubby briar glowing red in the paling light. The Rabbit, with his old shooting-coat, with the yarn of the one woodcock he nearly got, with his cheery laugh. But they never found anything of him—an eight-inch shell is at any rate merciful.

Torps—the naval candidate: one of the worst and most gallant riders that ever threw a leg across a horse. Somewhere in the depths of the Pacific, with the great heaving combers as his grave, he lies peacefully; and as for a little while he had gasped and struggled while hundreds of others gasped and struggled near him—perhaps he, too, had seen the hills opposite once again even as the Last Fence loomed in front and the whispered Kismet came from his lips. . . .

Hugh—the son of the house close by. Twice wounded, and now out again in Mesopotamia. Did the sound of the water come to him as the sun dropped, slow and pitiless, into the west? The same parching, crawling days following one another in deadly monotony: the same . . .

"Dreaming, Jim?" A woman's voice behind him broke on the man's thoughts.

"Yes, lady," he answered soberly. "Dreaming. Some of the ghosts we knew have been coming to me out of the blue grey mists." He fell into step beside her, and they moved towards the house.

"Ah! don't," she whispered—"don't! Oh! it's wicked, this war; cruel, damnable." She stopped and faced him, her breast rising and falling quickly. "And we can't follow you, Jim—we women. You go into the unknown."

"Yes—yours is the harder part. You can only wait and wonder."

"Wait and wonder!" She laughed bitterly. "Hope and pray—while God sleeps."

"Hush, lady!" he answered quietly; "for that way there lies no peace. Is Sybil indoors?"

"Yes—she's expecting you. Thank goodness you're not going out yet awhile, Jim; the child is fretting herself sick over her brother as it is—and when you go. . . ."

"Yes—when I go, what then?" he asked quietly. "Because I'm very nearly fit again, Lady Alice. My arm is nearly all right."

"Do you want to go back, Jim?" Her quiet eyes searched his face. "Look at that."

They had rounded a corner, and in front of them

a man was leaning against a wall talking to the cook. They were in the stage known as walking-out—or is it keeping company? The point is immaterial and uninteresting. But the man, fit and strong, was in a starred trade. He was a forester—or had been since the first rumour of compulsion had startled his poor tremulous spirit. A very fine, but not unique example of the genuine shirker. . . .

"What has he to do with us?" said Jim bitterly. "That thing takes his stand along with the criminals, and the mental degenerates. He's worse than a conscientious objector. And we've got no choice. He reaps the benefits for which he refuses to fight. I don't want to go back to France particularly; every feeling I've got revolts at the idea just at present. I want to be with Sybil, as you know; I want to—oh! God knows! I was mad over the water—it bit into me; I was caught by the fever. It's an amazing thing how it gets hold of one. All the dirt and discomfort, and the boredom and the fright—one would have thought . . ." He laughed. "I suppose it's the madness in the air. But I'm sane now."

"Are you? I wonder for how long. Let's go in and have some tea." The woman led the way indoors; there was silence again save only for the sound of the river.

CHAPTER II

THE WOMEN AND—THE MEN

WHEN Jim Denver told Lady Alice Conway that he was sane again, he spoke no more than the truth. A few weeks in France, and then a shattered arm had brought him back to England with more understanding than he had ever possessed before. He had gone out the ordinary Englishman—casual, sporting, easy going, somewhat apathetic; he had come back a thinker as well, at times almost a dreamer. It affects different men in different ways—but none escape. And that is what those others cannot understand—those others who have not been across. Even the man who comes back on short leave hardly grasps how the thing has changed him: hardly realises that the madness is still in his soul. He has not time; his leave is just an interlude. He is back again in France almost before he realises he has left it. In mind he has never left it.

There is humour there in plenty—farce even; boredom, excitement, passion, hatred. Every human emotion runs its full gamut in the Land of Topsy Turvy;

in the place where the life of a man is no longer three-score years and ten, but just so long as the Great Reaper may decide and no more. And you are caught in the whirl—you are tossed here and there by a life of artificiality, a life not of one's own seeking, but a life which, having once caught you, you are loath to let go.

Which is a hard saying, and one impossible of comprehension to those who wait behind—to the wives, to the mothers, to the women. To them the leave-train pulling slowly out of Victoria Station, with their man waving a last adieu from the carriage window, means the ringing down of the curtain once again. The unknown has swallowed him up—the unknown into which they cannot follow him. Be he in a Staff office at the base or with his battalion in the trenches, he has gone where the woman to whom he counts as all the world cannot even picture him in her mind. To her Flanders is Flanders and war is war—and there are casualty lists. What matter that his battalion is resting; what matter that he is going through a course somewhere at the back of beyond? He has gone into the Unknown; the whistle of the train steaming slowly out is the voice of the call-boy at the drop curtain. And now the train has passed out of sight—or is it only that her eyes are dim with the tears she kept back while he was with her?

At last she turns and goes blindly back to the room where they had breakfast; she sees once more the chair he used, the crumpled morning paper, the discarded cigarette. And there let us leave her with tear-stained face and a pathetic little sodden handkerchief clutched in one hand. "O God! dear God! send him back to me." Our women do not show us this side very much when we are on leave; perhaps it is as well, for the ground on which we stand is holy. . . .

. . . . . .

And what of the man? The train is grinding through Herne Hill when he puts down his *Times* and catches sight of another man in his brigade also returning from leave.

"Hullo, old man! What sort of a time have you had?"

"Top-hole. How's yourself? Was that your memsahib at the station?"

"Yes. Dislike women at these partings as a general rule—but she's wonderful."

"They're pulling the brigade out to rest, I hear."

"So I believe. Anyway, I hope they've buried that dead Hun just in front of us. He was getting beyond a joke. . . ."

He is back in the life over the water again; there is nothing incongruous to him in his sequence of remarks; the time of his leave has been too short for

the contrast to strike him. In fact, the whirl of gaiety in which he has passed his seven days seems more unreal than his other life—than the dead German. And it is only when a man is wounded and comes home to get fit, when he idles away the day in the home of his fathers, with a rod or a gun to help him back to convalescence, when the soothing balm of utter peace and contentment creeps slowly through his veins, that he looks back on the past few months as a runner on a race just over. He has given of his best; he is ready to give of his best again; but at the moment he is exhausted; panting, but at rest. For the time the madness has left him; he is sane. But it is only for the time. . . .

. . . . . .

He is able to think coherently; he is able to look on things in their proper perspective. He knows. The bits in the kaleidoscope begin to group coherently, to take definite form, and he views the picture from the standpoint of a rational man. To him the leave-train contains no illusions; the territory is not unknown. No longer does a dead Hun dwarf his horizon to the exclusion of all else. He has looked on the thing from close quarters; he has been mad with passion and shaking with fright; he has been cold and wet, he has been hot and thirsty. Like a blaze of tropical vegetation from which individual colours re-

fuse to be separated, so does the jumble of his life in Flanders strike him as he looks back on it. Isolated occurrences seem unreal, hard to identify. The little things which then meant so much now seem so paltry; the things he hardly noticed now loom big. Above all, the grim absurdity of the whole thing strikes him; civilisation has at last been defined. . . .

He marvels that men can be such wonderful, such super-human fools; his philosophy changes. He recalls grimly the particular night on which he crept over a dirty ploughed field and scrambled into a shell-hole as he saw the thin green streak of a German flare like a bar of light against the blackness; then the burst—the ghostly light flooding the desolate landscape—the crack of a solitary rifle away to his left. And as the flare came slowly hissing down, a ball of fire, he saw the other occupant of his hiding-place—a man's leg, just that, nothing more. And he laughs; the thing is too absurd.

It is; it is absurd; it is monstrous, farcical. The realisation has come to him; he is sane—for a time.

Sane: but for how long? It varies with the type. There are some who love the game—who love it for itself alone. They sit on the steps of the War Office, and drive their C.O.'s mad: they pull strings both male and female, until the powers that be rise in their wrath, and consign them to perdition and—France.

There are others who do not take it quite like that. They do not *want* to go back particularly—and if they were given an important job in England, a job for which they had special aptitude, in which they knew they were invaluable, they would take it without regret. But though they may not seek earnestly for France—neither do they seek for home. Their wants do not matter; their private interests do not count: it is only England to-day. . . .

And lastly there is a third class, the class to whom that accursed catch-phrase, "Doing his bit," means everything. There are some who consider they have done their bit—that they need do no more. They draw comparisons and become self-righteous. "Behold I am not as other men are," they murmur complacently; "have not I kept the home fires burning, and amassed money making munitions?" I am doing my bit." "I have been out; I have been hit—and *he* has not. Why should I go again? I have done my bit." Well, friend, it may be as you say. But methinks there is only one question worth putting and answering to-day. Don't bother about having done your bit. Are you doing your *all?* Let us leave it at that.

CHAPTER III

THE WOMAN AND THE MAN

"WHEN'S your board, Jim?" The flickering light of the fire lit up the old oak hall, playing on the face of the girl buried in an easy chair. Tea was over, and they were alone.

"On Tuesday, dear," he answered gravely.

"But you aren't fit, old man; you don't think you're fit yet, do you?" There was a note of anxiety in her voice.

"I'm perfectly fit, Sybil," he said quietly—"perfectly fit, my dear."

"Then you'll go back soon?" She looked at him with frightened eyes.

"Just as soon as they'll send me. I am going to ask the Board to pass me fit 'for General Service.'"

"Oh, Jim!"—he hardly caught the whisper. "Oh, Jim! my man."

"Well——" he came over and knelt in front of her.

"It makes me sick," she cried fiercely, "to think of you and Hugh and men like you—and then to think of all these other cowardly beasts. My dear, my dear—do you *want* to go back?"

"At present, I don't. I'm utterly happy here with you, and the old peaceful country life. I'm afraid, Syb—I'm afraid of going on with it. I'm afraid of its sapping my vitality—I'm afraid of never wanting to go back." His voice died away, and then suddenly he leant forward and kissed her on the mouth.

"Come over here a moment," he stood up and drew her to him. "Come over here." With his arm round her shoulders he led her over to a great portrait in oils that hung against the wall, the portrait of a stern-faced soldier in the uniform of a forgotten century. To the girl the picture of her great-grandfather was not a thing of surpassing interest—she had seen it too often before. But she was a girl of understanding, and she realised that the soul of the man beside her was in the melting-pot; and, moreover, that she might make or mar the mould into which it must run. So in her wisdom she said nothing, and waited.

"I want you to listen to me for a bit, Syb," he began after a while. "I'm not much of a fist at talking—especially on things I feel very deeply about. I can't track my people back like you can. The corresponding generation in my family to that old buster was a junior inkslinger in a small counting-house up North. And that junior inkslinger made good: you know what I'm worth to-day if the governor died."

He started to pace restlessly up and down the hall, while the girl watched him quietly.

"Then came this war and I went into it—not for any highfalutin motives, not because I longed to avenge Belgium—but simply because my pals were all soldiers or sailors, and it never occurred to me not to. In fact at first I was rather pleased with myself—I treated it as a joke more or less. The governor was inordinately proud of me; the mater had about twelve dozen photographs of me in uniform sent round the country to various bored and unwilling recipients; and lots of people combined to tell me what a damn fine fellow I was. Do you think he'd have thought so?" He stopped underneath the portrait and for a while gazed at the painted face with a smile.

"That old blackguard up there—who lived every moment of his life—do you think he would have accounted that to me for credit? What would *he* say if he knew that in a crisis like this there are men who cloak perfect sight behind blue glasses; that there are men who have joined home defence units though they are perfectly fit to fight anywhere? And what would he say, Sybil, if he knew that a man, even though he'd done something, was now resting on his oars—content?"

"Go on, dear!" The girl's eyes were shining now.

"I'm coming to the point. This morning the old dad started on the line of various fellows he knew whose sons hadn't been out yet; and he didn't see why I should go a second time—before they went. The business instinct to a certain extent, I suppose—the point of view of a business man. But would *he* understand that?" Again he nodded to the picture.

"I think——" She began to speak, and then fell silent.

"Ah! but would he, my dear? What of Hugh, of the Rabbit, of Torps? With them it was bred in the bone—with me it was not. For years I and mine have despised the soldier and the sailor: for years you and yours have despised the counting-house. And all that is changing. Over there the tinkers, the tailors, the merchants, are standing together with the old breed of soldier—the two lots are beginning to understand one another—to respect one another. You're learning from us, and we're learning from you, though *he* would never have believed that possible."

Jim was standing very close to the girl, and his voice was low.

"It's because I'm not very sure of one of the lessons I've learnt: it's because at times I do think it hard that others should not take their fair share that I must get back to that show quick—damn quick.

"I want to be worthy of that old ancestor of yours

—now that I'm going to marry one of his family. I know we're all mad—I know the world's mad; but, Syb, dear, you wouldn't have me sane, would you; not for ever? And I shall be if I stay here any longer. . . ."

"I understand, Jim," she answered, after a while. "I understand exactly. And I wouldn't have you sane, except just now for a little while. Because it's a glorious madness, and"—she put both her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately—"and I love you."

Which was quite illogical and inconsequent—but there you are. What is not illogical and inconsequent nowadays?

From which it will be seen that Jim Denver was not of the first of the three types which I have mentioned. He did not love the game for itself alone; my masters, there are not many who do. But there was no job in England in which he would prove invaluable: though there were many which with a little care he might have adorned beautifully.

And just because there *is* blood in the counting-house, which only requires to be brought out to show itself, he knew that he must go back—he knew that it was his job.

. . . . . .

That wild enthusiasm which he had shared with

other subalterns in his battalion before they had been over the first time was lacking now; he was calmer—more evenly balanced. He had attained the courage of knowledge instead of the courage of ignorance.

No longer did the men who waited to be fetched excuse him—even though he had "done his bit." No longer was it possible to shelter behind another man's failure, and plead for so-called equality of sacrifice. To him had come the meaning of tradition—that strange, nameless something which has kept regiments in a position, battered with shells, stunned with shock, gassed, brain reeling, mind gone, with nothing to hold them except that nameless something which says to them, "Hold on!" While other regiments, composed of men as brave, have not held. To him had come that quality which has sent men laughing and talking without a quaver to their death; that quality which causes men—eaten with fever, lonely, weary to death, thinking themselves forsaken even of God—to carry on the Empire's work in the uttermost corners of the globe, simply because it is their job.

He had assimilated to a certain extent the ideas of that stern, dead soldier; he had visualised them; he had realised that the destinies of a country are not entrusted to all her children. Many are not worthy to handle them, which makes the glory for the few all the greater. . . .

Winds of the world, give answer! They are whimpering
to and fro—
And what should they know of England, who only
England know?
The poor little street-bred people that vapour and fume
and brag,
They are lifting their heads in the stillness to yelp at
the English Flag.

. . . . . .

Never the lotos closes, never the wild-fowl wake,
But a soul goes out on the East wind that died for
England's sake—
Man or woman or suckling, mother or bride or maid—
Because on the bones of the English the English flag is
stayed.

CHAPTER IV

"THE REGIMENT"

ON the Tuesday a board of doctors passed Jim Denver fit for General Service, having first given him the option of a month's home service if he liked. Two days after he turned up at the depôt of his regiment, where he found men in various stages of convalescence—light duty, ordinary duty at home, and fit to go out like himself. One or two he knew, and most of them he didn't. There were a few old regular officers and a large number of very new ones —who were being led in the way they should go.

But there is little to tell of the time he spent waiting to go out. This is not a diary of his life—not even an account of it; it is merely an attempt to portray a state of mind—an outlook on life engendered by war, in a man whom war had caused to think for the first time.

And so the only incidents which I propose to give of his time at the depôt is a short account of a smoking concert he attended and a conversation he had the following day with one Vane, a stockbroker. The

two things taken individually meant but little: taken together—well, the humour was the humour of the Land of Topsy Turvy. A delicate humour, not to be appreciated by all: with subtle shades and delicate strands and bloody brutality woven together. . . .

. . . . . .

A sudden silence settled on the gymnasium; the man at the piano turned round so as to hear better; the soldiers sitting astride the horse ceased laughing and playing the fool.

At a table at the end of the big room, seen dimly through the smoke-clouded atmosphere, sat a group of officers, while the regimental sergeant-major, supported by other great ones of the non-commissioned rank near by, presided over the proceedings.

Occasionally a soldier-waiter passed behind the officers' chairs, armed with a business-like bottle and a box of dangerous-looking cigars; and unless he was watched carefully he was apt to replenish the liquid refreshment in a manner which suggested that he regarded soda as harmful in the extreme to the human system. Had he not received his instructions from that great man the regimental himself?

For an hour and a half the smoking concert had been in progress; the Brothers Bimbo, those masterly knock-about comedians, had given their performance amid rapturous applause. In life the famous pair were

a machine-gun sergeant and a cook's mate; but on such gala occasions they became the buffoons of the regiment. They were the star comics: a position of great responsibility and not to be lightly thought of. An officer had given a couple of rag-time efforts; the melancholy corporal in C Company had obliged with a maundering tune of revolting sentimentality, and one of A Company scouts had given a so-called comic which caused the padre to keep his eyes fixed firmly on the floor, though at times his mouth twitched suspiciously, and made the colonel exclaim to his second in command in tones of heartfelt relief: "Thank Heavens, my wife couldn't come!" Knowing his commanding officer's wife the second in command agreed in no less heartfelt voice.

But now a silence had settled on the great room: and all eyes were turned on the regimental sergeant-major, who was standing up behind the table on which the programme lay, and behind which he had risen every time a new performer had appeared during the evening, in order to introduce him to the assembly. There are many little rites and ceremonies in smoking concerts. . . .

This time, however, he did not inform the audience that Private MacPherson would now oblige—that is the mystic formula. He stood there, waiting for silence.

"Non-commissioned officers and men"—his voice carried to every corner of the building—"I think you will all agree with me that we are very pleased to see Colonel Johnson and all our officers here with us to-night. It is our farewell concert in England: in a few days we shall all be going—somewhere; and it gives us all great pleasure to welcome the officers who are going to lead us when we get to that somewhere. Therefore I ask you all to fill up your glasses and drink to the health of Colonel Johnson and all our officers."

A shuffling of feet; an abortive attempt on the part of the pianist to strike up "For he's a jolly good fellow" before his cue, an attempt which died horribly in its infancy under the baleful eye of the sergeant-major; a general creaking and grunting and then—muttered, shouted, whispered from a thousand throats—"Our Officers." The pianist started—right this time—and in a second the room was ringing with the well-known words. Cheers, thunderous cheers succeeded it, and through it all the officers sat silent and quiet. Most were new to the game; to them it was just an interesting evening; a few were old at it; a few, like Jim, had been across, and it was they who had a slight lump in their throats. It brought back memories—memories of other men, memories of similar scenes. . . .

At last the cheering died away, only to burst out again with renewed vigour. The colonel was standing up, a slight smile playing round his lips, the glint of many things in his quiet grey eyes. To the second in command, a sterling soldier but one of little imagination, there came for the first time in his life the meaning of the phrase, "the windows of the soul." For in the eyes of the man who stood beside him he saw those things of which no man speaks; the things which words may kill.

He saw understanding, affection, humour, pain; he saw the pride of possession struggling with the sorrow of future loss; he saw the desire to test his creation struggling with the fear that a first test always brings; he saw visions of glorious possibilities, and for a fleeting instant he saw the dreadful abyss of a hideous failure. Aye, for a few moments the second in command looked not through a glass darkly, but saw into the unplumbed depths of a man who had been weighed in the balance and not found wanting; a man who had faced responsibility and would face it again; a man of honour, a man of humour, a man who knew.

"My lads," he began—and the quiet, well-modulated voice reached every man in the room just as clearly as the harsher voice of the previous speaker—"as the sergeant-major has just said, in a few days we shall be sailing for—somewhere. The bustle and fulness

of your training life will be over; you will be confronted with the real thing. And though I do not want to mar the pleasure of this evening in any way or to introduce a serious tone to the proceedings, I do want to say just one or two things which may stick in your minds and, perhaps, on some occasion may help you. This war is not a joke; it is one of the most hideous and ghastly tragedies that have ever been foisted on the world; I have been there and I know. You are going to be called on to stand all sorts of discomfort and all sorts of boredom; there will be times when you'd give everything you possess to know that there was a picture-palace round the corner. You may not think so now, but remember my words when the time comes—remember, and stick it.

"There will be times when there's a sinking in your stomach and a singing in your head; when men beside you are staring upwards with the stare that does not see; when the sergeant has taken it through the forehead and the nearest officer is choking up his life in the corner of the traverse. But—there's still your rifle; perhaps there's a machine-gun standing idle; anyway, remember my words then, and stick it.

"Stick it, my lads, as those others have done before you. Stick it, for the credit of the regiment, for the glory of our name. Remember always that that glory

lies in your hands, each one of you individually. And just as it is in the power of each one of you to tarnish it irreparably, so is it in the power of each one of you to keep it going undimmed. Each one of us counts, men"—his voice sank a little—"each one of us has to play the game. Not because we're afraid of being punished if we're found out, but because it *is* the game."

He looked round the room slowly, almost searchingly, while the arc light spluttered and then burnt up again with a hiss.

"The Regiment, my lads—the Regiment." His voice was tense with feeling. "It is only the Regiment that counts."

He raised his glass, and the men stood up:

"The Regiment."

A woman sobbed somewhere in the body of the gym., and for a moment, so it seemed to Denver, the wings of Death flapped softly against the windows. For a moment only—and then:

"Private Mulvaney will now oblige."

Jim walked slowly home. He remembered just such another evening before his own battalion went out. Would those words of the Colonel have their effect: would some white-faced man stick it the better for the remembrance of that moment: would some machine-

gun fired with trembling dying hands take its toll? Perhaps—who knows? The ideal of the soldier is there—the ideal towards which the New Armies are led. Thus the first incident. . . .

CHAPTER V

THE CONTRAST

THE following afternoon Denver, strolling back from the town, was hailed by a man in khaki, standing in the door of his house. He knew the man well, Vane, by name—had dined with him often in the days when he was in training himself. A quiet man, with a pleasant wife and two children. Vane was a stock-broker by trade: and just before Jim went out he had enlisted.

"Come in and have a gargle. I've just got back on short leave." Vane came to the gate.

"Good," Jim answered. "Mrs. Vane must be pleased." They strolled up the drive and in through the door. "You're looking very fit, old man. Flanders seems to suit you."

"My dear fellow, it does. It's the goods. I never knew what living was before. The thought of that cursed office makes me tired—and once"—he shrugged his shoulders—"it filled my life. Say when."

"Cheer oh!" They clinked glasses. "I thought you were taking a commission."

"I am—very shortly. The colonel has recommended me for one, and I gather the powers that be approve. But in a way I'm sorry, you know. I've got a great pal in my section—who kept a whelk stall down in Whitechapel."

"They're the sort," laughed Jim. "The Cockney takes some beating."

"This bird's a flier. We had quite a cheery little show the other night, just him and me. About a week ago we were up in the trenches—bored stiff, and yet happy in a way, you know, when Master Boche started to register.[1] I suppose it was a new battery or something, but they were using crumps, not shrapnel. They weren't very big, but they were very close—and they got closer. You know that nasty droning noise, then the hell of an explosion—that great column of blackish yellow smoke, and the bits pinging through the air overhead."

"I do," remarked Jim tersely.

Vane laughed. "Well, he got a bracket; the first one

[1] For the benefit of the uninitiated, let me explain that the process of registering consists of finding the exact range to a certain object from a particular gun or battery. To find this range it is necessary to obtain what is known as a bracket: *i.e.* one burst beyond the object, and one burst short. The range is then known to lie between these two: and by a little adjustment the exact distance can be found.

was fifty yards short of the trench, and the second was a hundred yards over. Then he started to come back—always in the same line; and the line passed straight through our bit of the trench.

"'Ere, wot yer doing, you perishers? Sargint, go and stop 'em. Tell 'em I've been appointed purveyor of winkles to the Royal 'Ouse of the 'Un Emperor.' Our friend of the whelk stall was surveying the scene with intense disfavour. A great mass of smoke belched up from the ground twenty yards away, and he ducked instinctively. Then we waited—fifteen seconds about was the interval between shots. The men were a bit white about the gills—and, well the feeling in the pit of my tummy was what is known as wobbly. You know that feeling too?"

"I do," remarked Jim even more tersely.

Vane finished his drink. "Then it came, and we cowered. There was a roar like nothing on earth—the back of the trench collapsed, and the whole lot of us were buried. If the shell had been five yards short, it would have burst in the trench, and my whelk friend would have whelked no more."

Vane laughed. "We emerged, plucking mud from our mouths, and cursed. The Hun apparently was satisfied and stopped. The only person who wasn't satisfied was the purveyor of winkles to the Royal

'Ouse. He brooded through the day, but towards the evening he became more cheerful.

"'Look 'ere,' he said to me, ''ave you ever killed a 'Un?'

"'I think I did once,' I said. 'A fat man with a nasty face.'

"'Oh! you 'ave, 'ave you? Well, wot abaht killing one to-night. If they thinks I'm going to stand that sort of thing, they're —— —— wrong.' The language was the language of Whitechapel, but the sentiments were the sentiments of even the most rabid purist of speech.

"To cut a long story short, we went. And we were very lucky."

"You bumped your face into 'em, did you?" asked Jim, interested.

"We did. Man, it was a grand little scrap while it lasted, and it was the first one I'd had. It won't be the last."

"Did you kill your men?"

"Did we not? Welks brained his with the butt of his gun; and I did the trick with a bayonet." Vane became a little apologetic. "You know it was only my first, and I can't get it out of my mind." Then his eyes shone again. "To feel that steel go in—Good God! man—it was IT: it was . . ."

Then came the interruption. "Dear," said a voice

at the door, "the children are in bed; will you go up and say good night." . . . Thus the second incident. . . .

. . . . . .

As I said, taken separately the two incidents mean but little: taken together—there is humour: the whole humour of war.

An itinerant fishmonger and a worthy stockbroker are inculcated with wonderful ideals in order to fit them for sallying forth at night and killing complete strangers. And they revel in it. . . .

The highest form of emotionalism on one hand: a hole in the ground full of bluebottles and smells on the other. . . .

War . . . war in the twentieth century.

But there is nothing incompatible in it: it is only strange when analysed in cold blood. And Jim Denver, as I have said, was sane again: while Vane, the stockbroker, was still mad.

In fact, it is quite possible that the peculiar significance of the interruption in his story never struck him: that he never noticed the Contrast.

And what is going to be the result of it all on the Vanes of England? "Once the office filled my life." No man can go to the land of Topsy Turvy and come back the same—for good or ill it will change him. Though the madness leave him and sanity return, it

will not be the same sanity. Will he ever be content to settle down again after—the lawyer, the stock-broker, the small clerk? Back to the old dull routine, the same old train in the morning, the same deadly office, the same old home each evening. It hardly applies to the Jim Denvers—the men of money: but what of the others?

Will the scales have dropped from the eyes of the men who have really been through it? Shall we ever get back to the same old way? Heaven knows—but let us hope not. Anyway, it is all mere idle conjecture —and a digression to boot.

CHAPTER VI

BLACK, WHITE, AND—GREY

FOUR weeks after his board Jim Denver once again found himself in France.

Having reported his arrival, he sat down to await orders. Boulogne is not a wildly exhilarating place; though there is always the hotel where one may consume cocktails and potato chips, and hear strange truths about the war from people of great knowledge and understanding.

Moreover—though this is by the way—in Boulogne you get the first sniff of that atmosphere which England lacks; that subtle, indefinable something which war *in* a country produces in the spirit of its people. . . .

Gone is the stout lady of doubtful charm engaged in mastering the fox-trot, what time a band wails dismally in an alcove; gone is the wild-eyed flapper who bumps madly up and down the roads on the carrier of a motor-cycle. It has an atmosphere of its own this fair land of France to-day. It is laughing through its tears, and the laughter has an ugly sound—for the

Huns. They will hear that laughter soon, and the sound will give them to think fearfully.

But at the moment when Jim landed it was all very boring. The R.T.O. at Boulogne was bored; the A.S.C. officers at railhead were bored; the quartermaster guarding the regimental penates in a field west of Ypres was bored.

"Cheer up, old son," Jim remarked, slapping the last-named worthy heavily on the back. "You look peevish."

"Confound you," he gasped, when he'd recovered from choking. "This is my last bottle of whisky."

"Where's the battalion?" laughed Denver.

"Where d'you think? In a Turkish bath surrounded by beauteous houris?" the quartermaster snorted. "Still in the same damn mud-hole near Hooge."

"Good! I'll trot along up shortly. You know, I'm beginning to be glad I came back. I didn't want to particularly, at first: I was enjoying myself at home—but I felt I ought to, and now—'pon my soul—— How are you, Jones?"

A passing sergeant stopped and saluted. "Grand, sir. How's yourself? The boys will be glad you've come back."

Denver stood chatting with him for a few moments and then rejoined the pessimistic quartermaster.

"Don't rhapsodise," begged that worthy—"don't

rhapsodise; eat your lunch. If you tell me it will be good to see your men again, I shall assault you with the remnants of the tinned lobster. I know it will be good—no less than fifteen officers have told me so in the last six weeks. But I don't care—it leaves me quite, quite cold. If you're in France, you pine for England; when you're in England, you pine for France; and I sit in this damn field and get giddy."

Which might be described as to-day's great thought.

. . . . .

Thus did Jim Denver come back to his regiment. Once again the life of the moles claimed him—the life of the underworld: that strange existence of which so much has been written, and so little has been really grasped by those who have not been there. A life of incredible dreariness—yet possessing a certain "grip" of its own. A life of peculiar contrasts—where the suddenness—the abruptness of things strikes a man forcibly: the extraordinary contrasts of black and white. Sometimes they stand out stark and menacing, gleaming and brilliant; more often do they merge into grey. But always are they there. . . .

As I said before, my object is not to give a diary of my hero's life. I am not concerned with his daily vegetation in his particular hole, with Hooge on his right front and a battered farm close to. Sleep, eat, read, look through a periscope and then repeat the per-

formance. Occasionally an aerial torpedo, frequently bombs, at all times pessimistic sappers desiring working parties. But it was very much the "grey" of trench life during the three days that Jim sat in the front line by the wood that is called "Railway."

One episode is perhaps worthy of note. It was just one of those harmless little jests which give one an appetite for a hunk of bully washed down by a glass of tepid whisky and water. Now be it known to those who do not dabble in explosives, there are in the army two types of fuze which are used for firing charges. Each type is flexible, and about the thickness of a stout and well-nourished worm. Each, moreover, consists of an inner core which burns, protected by an outer covering—the idea being that on lighting one end a flame should pass along the burning inner core and explode in due course whatever is at the other end. There, however, their similarity ends; and their difference becomes so marked that the kindly powers that be have taken great precautions against the two being confused.

The first of these fuzes is called Safety—and the outer covering is black. In this type the inner core burns quite slowly at the rate of two or three feet to the minute. This is the fuze which is used in the preparation of the jam-tin bomb: an instrument of destruction which has caused much amusement to the

frivolous. A jam tin is taken and is filled with gun cotton, nails, and scraps of iron. Into the gun cotton is inserted a detonator; and into the detonator is inserted two inches of safety-fuze. The end of the safety-fuze is then lit, and the jam tin is presented to the Hun. It will readily be seen by those who are profound mathematicians, that if three feet of safety-fuze burn in a minute, two inches will burn in about three seconds—and three seconds is just long enough for the presentation ceremony. This in fact is the principal of all bombs both great and small.

The second of these fuzes is called Instantaneous—and the outer covering is orange. In this type the inner core burns quite quickly, at the rate of some thirty yards to the second, or eighteen hundred times as fast as the first. Should, therefore, an unwary person place two inches of this second fuze in his jam tin by mistake, and light it, it will take exactly one-6ooth of a second before he gets to the motto. Which is "movement with a meaning quite its own."

To Jim then came an idea. Why not with care and great cunning remove from the inner core of Instantaneous fuze its vulgar orange covering, and substitute instead a garb of sober black—and thus disguised present several bombs of great potency *unlighted* to the Hun.

The afternoon before they left for the reserve

trenches he staged his comedy in one act and an epilogue. A shower of bombs was propelled in the direction of the opposing cave-dwellers to the accompaniment of loud cries, cat calls, and other strange noises. The true artist never exaggerates, and quite half the bombs had genuine safety-fuze in them and were lit before being thrown. The remainder were not lit, it is perhaps superfluous to add.

The lazy peace of the afternoon was rudely shattered for the Huns. Quite a number of genuine bombs had exploded dangerously near their trench—while some had even taken effect in the trench. Then they perceived several unlit ones lying about—evidently propelled by nervous men who had got rid of them before lighting them properly. And there was much laughter in that German trench as they decided to give the epilogue by lighting them and throwing them back. Shortly after a series of explosions, followed by howls and groans, announced the carrying out of that decision. And once again the Hymn of Hate came faintly through the drowsy stillness. . . .

Those are the little things which occasionally paint the grey with a dab of white; the prowls at night—the joys of the sniper who has just bagged a winner and won the bag of nuts—all help to keep the spirits up when the pattern of earth in your particular hole causes a rush of blood to the head.

Incidentally this little comedy was destined to be Jim Denver's last experience of the Hun at close quarters for many weeks to come. The grey settled down like a pall, to lift in the fulness of time, to *the* black and white day of his life. But for the present—peace. And yet only peace as far as he was concerned personally. That very night, close to him so that he saw it all, some other battalions had a chequered hour or so—which is all in the luck of the game. To-day it's the man over the road—to-morrow it's you. . . .

They occurred about 2 a.m.—the worries of the men over the road. Denver had moved to his other hole, courteously known as the reserve trenches, and there seated in his dug-out he discussed prospects generally with the Major. There were rumours that the division was moving from Ypres, and not returning there—a thought which would kindle hope in the most pessimistic.

"Don't you believe it," answered the Major gloomily. "Those rumours are an absolute frost."

"Cheer up! cully, we'll soon be dead." Denver laughed. "Have some rum."

He poured some out into a mug and passed the water. "Quiet to-night—isn't it? I was reading to-day that the Italians——"

"You aren't going to quote any war expert at me, are you?"

"Well—er—I was: why not?"

"Because I have a blood-feud with war experts. I loathe and detest the breed. Before I came out here their reiterated statement made monthly that we should be on the Rhine by Tuesday fortnight was a real comfort. We always got to Tuesday fortnight—but we've never actually paddled in the bally river."

"To err is human; to get paid for it is divine," murmured Jim.

"Bah!" the Major filled his pipe aggressively. "What about the steam-roller, what about the Germans being reduced to incurable epileptics in the third line trenches—what about that drivelling ass who said the possession of heavy guns was a disadvantage to an army owing to their immobility?"

"Have some more rum, sir?" remarked Jim soothingly.

"But I could have stood all that—they were trifles." The Major was getting warmed up to it. "This is what finished me." He pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket. "Read that, my boy—read that and ponder."

Jim took the paper and glanced at it.

"I carry that as my talisman. In the event of my death I've given orders for it to be sent to the author."

"But what's it all about?" asked Denver.

" 'At the risk of repeating myself, I wish again to

asseverate what I drew especial attention to last week, and the week before, and the one before that; as a firm grasp of this essential fact is imperative to an undistorted view of the situation. Whatever minor facts may now or again crop up in this titanic conflict, we must not shut our eyes to the rules of war. They are unchangeable, immutable; the rules of Cæsar were the rules of Napoleon, and are in fact the rules that I myself have consistently laid down in these columns. They cannot change: this war will be decided by them as surely as night follows day; and those ignorant persons who are permitted to express their opinions elsewhere would do well to remember that simple fact.'

"What the devil is this essential fact?"

"Would you like to know? I got to it after two columns like that."

"What was it?" laughed Jim.

"'An obstacle in an army's path is that which obstructs the path of the army in question.'"

"After that—more rum." Jim solemnly decanted the liquid. "You deserve it. You . . ."

"Stand to." A shout from the trench outside—repeated all along until it died away in the distance. The Major gulped his rum and dived for the door—while Jim groped for his cap. Suddenly out of the still night there came a burst of firing, sudden and furious. The firing was taken up all along the line, and then

the guns started and a rain of shrapnel came down behind the British lines.

Away—a bit in front on the other side of the road to Jim's trench there were woods—woods of unenviable reputation. Hence the name of "Sanctuary." In the middle of them, on the road, lay the ruined château and village of Hooge—also of unenviable reputation.

And towards these woods the eyes of all were turned.

"What the devil is it?" shouted the man beside Jim. "Look at them lights in the trees."

The devil it was. Dancing through the darkness of the trees were flames and flickering lights, like will-o'-the-wisps playing over an Irish bog. And men, looking at one another, muttered sullenly. They remembered the gas; what new devilry was this?

Up in the woods things were moving. Hardly had the relieving regiments taken over their trenches, when from the ground in front there seemed to leap a wall of flame. It rushed towards them and, falling into the trenches and on to the men's clothes, burnt furiously like brandy round a plum pudding. The woods were full of hurrying figures dashing blindly about, cursing and raving. For a space pandemonium reigned. The Germans came on, and it looked as if there might be trouble. The regiments who had just been relieved

came back, and after a while things straightened out a little. But our front trenches in those woods, when morning broke, were not where they had been the previous night. . . .

Liquid fire—yet one more invention of "Kultur"; gas; the moat at Ypres poisoned with arsenic; crucifixion; burning death squirted from the black night—suddenly, without warning: truly a great array of Kultured triumphs. . . . And with it all—failure. To fight as a sportsman fights and lose has many compensations; to fight as the German fights and lose must be to taste of the dregs of hell.

But that is how they *do* fight, whatever interesting surmises one may make of their motives and feelings. And that is how it goes on over the water—the funny mixture of the commonplace of everyday with the great crude, cruel realities of life and death.

. . . . . .

But as I said, for the next few weeks the grey screen cloaked those crude realities as far as Jim was concerned. Rumour for once had proved true; the division was pulled out, and his battalion found itself near Poperinghe.

"Months of boredom punctuated by moments of intense fright" is a definition of war which undoubtedly Noah would have regarded as a chestnut. And I

should think it doubtful if there has ever been a war in which this definition was more correct.

Jim route marched: he trained bombers: he dined in Poperinghe and went to the Follies. Also, he allowed other men to talk to him of their plans for leave: than which no more beautiful form of unselfishness is laid down anywhere in the Law or the Prophets.

On the whole the time did not drag. There is much of interest for those who have eyes to see in that country which fringes the Cock Pit of Europe. Hacking round quietly most afternoons on a horse borrowed from someone, the spirit of the land got into him, that blood-soaked, quiet, uncomplaining country, whose soul rises unconquerable from the battered ruins.

Horses exercising, lorries crashing and lurching over the pavé roads. G.S. wagons at the walk, staff motors —all the necessary wherewithal to preserve the safety of the mud holes up in front—came and went in a ceaseless procession; while every now and then a local cart with mattresses and bedsteads, tables and crockery, tied on perilously with bits of string, would come creaking past—going into the unknown, leaving the home of years.

Ypres, that tragic charnel house, with the great jagged holes torn out of the pavé; with the few remaining walls of the Cathedral and Cloth Hall cracked and leaning outwards; with the strange symbolical

touch of the black hearse which stood untouched in one of the arches. Rats everywhere, in the sewers and broken walls; in the crumbling belfry above birds, cawing discordantly. The statue of the old gentleman which used to stand serene and calm amidst the wreckage, now lay broken on its face. But the stench was gone—the dreadful stench of death which had clothed it during the second battle; it was just a dead town—dead and decently buried in great heaps of broken brick. . . .

Vlamertinghe, with the little plot of wooden crosses by the cross roads; Elverdinghe, where the gas first came, and the organ pipes lay twisted in the wreckage of the unroofed church; where the long row of French graves rest against the château wall, graves covered with long grass—each with an empty bottle upside down at their head.

> And when Thyself with shining Foot shall pass
> Among the Guests star-scatter'd on the Grass,
> . . . . . turn down an empty Glass.
>
> . . . . .

And in the family archives are some excellent reproductions—not photographs of course, for the penalty for carrying a camera is death at dawn—of ruined churches and shell-battered châteaux. Perhaps the most interesting one, at any rate the most human, is a

"reproduction" of a group of cavalry men. They had been digging in a little village a mile behind the firing-line—a village battered and dead from which the inhabitants had long since fled. Working in the garden of the local doctor, they were digging a trench which ran back to the cellar of the house, when on the scene of operations had suddenly appeared the doctor himself. By signs he possessed himself of a shovel, and, pacing five steps from the kitchen door and three from the tomato frame, he too started to dig.

"His wife's portrait, probably," confided the cavalry officer to Jim, as they watched the proceeding. "Or possibly an urn with her ashes."

It was a sergeant who first gave a choking cry and fainted; he was nearest the hole.

"Yes," remarked Jim, "he's found the urn."

With frozen stares they watched the last of twelve dozen of light beer go into the doctor's cart. With pallid lips the officer saw three dozen of good champagne snatched from under his nose.

"Heavens! man," he croaked, "it was *dry* too. If our trench had been a yard that way. . . ." He leant heavily on his stick, and groaned.

The moment was undoubtedly pregnant with emotion.

"'E'ad a nasty face, that man—a nasty face. Oh, 'orrible."

Hushed voices came from the group of leaners. The "reproduction" depicts the psychological moment when the doctor with a joyous wave of the hand wished them *"Bonjour, messieurs,"* and drove off.

"Not one—not one ruddy bottle—not the smell of a perishing cork. Stung!"

But Jim had left.

Which very silly and frivolous story is topsy-turvy land up to date, or at any rate typical of a large bit of it.

• • • • •

CHAPTER VII

ARCHIE AND OTHERS

HOWEVER, to be serious. It was as he came away from this scene of alarm and despondency that Jim met an old pal who boasted the gunner badge, and whom conversation revealed as the proud owner of an Archie, or anti-aircraft gun. And as the salient is perhaps more fruitful in aeroplanes than any other part of the line, and the time approached five o'clock (which is generally the hour of their afternoon activity), Jim went to see the fun.

In front, an observing biplane buzzed slowly to and fro, watching the effect of a mother [1] shooting at some mark behind the German lines. With the gun concealed in the trees, a gunner subaltern altered his range and direction as each curt wireless message flashed from the 'plane. "Lengthen 200—half a degree left." And so on till they got it. Occasionally, with a vicious crack, a German anti-aircraft shell would explode in the air above in a futile endeavour to reach the observer, and a great mass of acrid yellow or black fumes would disperse slowly. Various machines, each intent on its own job, rushed to and fro, and in the distance,

[1] 9·2" Howitzer.

like a speck in the sky, a German monoplane was travelling rapidly back over its own lines, having finished its reconnaissance.

Behind it, like the wake of a steamer, little dabs of white plastered the blue sky. English shrapnel bursting from other anti-aircraft guns. Jim's gunner friend seemed to know most of them by name, as old pals whom he had watched for many a week on the same errand; and from him Jim gathered that the moment approached for the appearance of Panting Lizzie. Lizzie, apparently, was a fast armoured German biplane which came over his gun every fine evening about the same hour. For days and weeks had he fired at it, so far without any success, but he still had hopes. The gun was ready, cocked wickedly upon its motor mounting, covered with branches and daubed with strange blotches of paint to make it less conspicuous. Round the motor itself the detachment consumed tea, a terrier sat up and begged, a goat of fearsome aspect looked pensive. In front, in a chair, his eye glued to a telescope on a tripod, sat the look-out man.

. . . . .

It was just as Jim and his pal were getting down to a whisky and soda that Lizzie hove in sight. The terrier ceased to beg, the goat departed hurriedly, the officer spoke rapidly in a language incomprehensible to Jim, and the fun began. There are few things so

trying to listen to as an Archie, owing to the rapidity with which it fires; the gun pumps up and down with a series of sharp cracks, every two or three shots being followed by more incomprehensible language from the officer. Adjustment after each shot is impossible owing to the fact that three or four shells have left the gun and are on their way before the first one explodes. It was while Jim, with his fingers in his ears, was watching the shells bursting round the aeroplane and marvelling that nothing seemed to happen, that he suddenly realised that the gun had stopped firing. Looking at the detachment, he saw them all gazing upwards. From high up, sounding strangely faint in the air, came the zipping of a Maxim.

"By Gad!" muttered the gunner officer; "this is going to be some fight."

Bearing down on Panting Lizzie came a British armoured 'plane, and from it the Maxim was spitting. And now there started a very pretty air duel. I am no airman, to tell of spirals, and glides, and the multifarious twistings and turnings. At times the German's Maxim got going as well; at times both were silent, manœuvring for position. The Archies were not firing—the machines were too close together. Once the German seemed to drop like a stone for a thousand feet or so. "Got him!" shouted Jim—but the gunner shook his head.

"A common trick," he answered. "He found it getting a bit warm, and that upsets one's range. You'll find he'll be off now."

Sure enough he was—with his nose for home he turned tail and fled. The gunner shouted an order, and they opened fire again, while the British 'plane pursued, its Maxim going continuously. Generally honour is satisfied without the shedding of blood; each, having consistently missed the other and resisted the temptations of flying low over his opponents' guns, returns home to dinner. But in this case—well, whether it was Archie or whether it was the Maxim is really immaterial. Suddenly a great sheet of flame seemed to leap from the German machine and a puff of black smoke: it staggered like a shot bird and then, without warning, it fell—a streak of light, like some giant shooting star rushing to the earth. The Maxim stopped firing, and after circling round a couple of times the British machine buzzed contentedly back to bed. And in a field—somewhere behind our lines—there lay for many a day, deep embedded in a hole in the ground, the battered remnants of Panting Lizzie, with its great black cross stuck out of the earth for all to see. Somewhere in the débris, crushed and mangled beyond recognition, could have been found the remnants of two German airmen. Which might be called the black and white of the overworld.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE STAFF

BUT now rumour was getting busy in earnest—things were in the air. There were talks of a great offensive—and although there be rumour in England, though bucolic stationmasters have brushed the snow from the steppes of Russia out of railway carriages, I have no hesitation in saying that for quality and quantity the rumours that float round the army in France have de Rougemont beat to a frazzle. In this case expectations were fulfilled, and two or three days after the decease of Panting Lizze, Jim and his battalion shook the dust of the Ypres district from their feet and moved away south.

It was then that our hero raised his third star. Shades of Wellington! A captain in a year. But I make no comment. A sense of humour, invaluable at all times, is indispensable in this war, if one wishes to preserve an unimpaired digestion.

But another thing happened to him, too, about this time, for, owing to the sudden sickness of a member of his General's Staff, he found himself attached tem-

porarily for duty. No longer did he flat foot it, but in a large and commodious motor-car he viewed life from a different standpoint. And, solely owing to this temporary appointment, he was able to see the launching of the attack near Loos at the end of September. He saw the wall of gas and smoke roll slowly forward towards the German trenches over the wide space that separated the trenches in that part of the line. Great belching explosions seemed to shatter the vapour periodically, as German shells exploded in it, causing it to rise in swirling eddies, as from some monstrous cauldron, only to sink sullenly back and roll on. And behind it came the assaulting battalions, lines of black pigmies charging forward.

And later he heard of the Scotsmen who chased the flying Huns like terriers after rats, grunting, cursing, swearing, down the gentle slope past Loos and up the other side; on to Hill 70, where they swayed backwards and forwards over the top, while some with the lust of killing on them fought their way into the town beyond—and did not return. He heard of the battery that blazed over open sights at the Germans during the morning, till, running out of ammunition, the guns ceased fire, a mark to every German rifle. The battery remained there during the day, for there was not cover for a terrier, let alone a team of horses, and between the guns were many strange tableaux as Death claimed

his toll. They got them away that night, but not before the gunners had taken back the breech-blocks—in case; for it was touch and go.

But this attack has already been described too often, and so I will say no more. I would rather write of those things which happened to Jim Denver himself, before he left the Land of Topsy Turvy for the second time. Only I venture to think that when the full story comes to be written—if ever—of that last week in September, or the surging forward past Loos and the Lone Tree to Hulluch and the top of 70, of the cavalry who waited for the chance that never came, and the German machine-guns hidden in the slag-heaps, the reading will be interesting. What happened would fill a book; what might have happened—a library.

It was a couple of days afterwards that he saw his first big batch of German prisoners. Five or six miles behind the firing-line in a great grass field, fenced in on all sides by barbed wire, was a batch of some seven hundred—almost all of them Prussians and Jägers. Munching food contentedly, they sat in rows on the ground; their dirty grey uniforms coated with dust and mud—unwashed, unshaven, and—well, if you are contemplating German prisoners, get "up wind." All around the field Tommies stood and gazed, now and

again offering them cigarettes. A few prisoners who could speak English got up and talked.

It struck Jim Denver then that he viewed these men with no antipathy; he merely gazed at them curiously as one gazes at animals in a "Zoo." And as we English are ever prone to such views, and as the Hymn of Hate and like effusions are regarded, and rightly so, as occasions for mirth, it was perhaps as well for Jim to realise the other point of view. There are two sides to every question, and the Germans believe in their hate just as we believe in our laughter. But when it is over, it will be unfortunate if we forget the hate too quickly.

. . . . . .

"What a nation we are!" said a voice beside Jim. He turned round and found a doctor watching the scene with a peculiar look in his eyes. "Suppose it had been the other way round! Suppose those were our men while the Germans were the captors! Do you think the scene would be like this?" His face twisted into a bitter smile. "There would have been armed soldiers walking up and down the ranks, kicking men in the stomach, hitting them on the head with rifle butts, tearing bandages off wounds—just for the fun of the thing. Sharing food!"—he laughed contemptuously—"why, they'd have been starving. Giving 'em

cigarettes!—why, they'd have taken away what they had already."

He turned and looked up the road. Walking down it were thirty or so German officers. From the button in the centre of their jackets hung in nearly every case the ribbon of the Iron Cross. Laughing, talking—one or two sneering—they came along and halted by the gate into the field. They had been questioned, and were waiting to be marched off with the men. A hundred yards or so away the cavalry escort was forming up.

"Man," cried the doctor, suddenly gripping Jim's arm in a vice, "it's wicked!" In his eyes there was an ugly look. "Look at those swine—all toddling off to Donington Hall—happy as you like. And think of the other side of the picture. Stuck with bayonets, hit, brutally treated, half-starved, thrown into cattle trucks. Good Heaven! it's horrible."

"We're not the sort to go in for retribution," said Jim, after a moment. "After all—oh! I don't know—but it's not quite cricket, is it? Just because they're swine . . . ?"

"Cricket!" the other snorted. "You make me tired. I tell you I'm sick to death of our kid-glove methods. No retribution! I suppose if a buck nigger hit your pal over the head with a club you'd give him a tract on charity and meekness. What would our ranting peda-

gogues say if their own sons had been crucified by the Germans as some of our wounded have been? You think I'm bitter?" He looked at Jim. "I am. You see, I was a prisoner myself until a few weeks ago." He turned and strolled away down the road. . . .

And now the escort was ready. An order shouted in the field, and the men got up, falling in in some semblance of fours. Slowly they filed through the gate and, with their own officers in front, the cortège started. Led by an English cavalry subaltern, with troopers at four or five horses' lengths alongside—some with swords drawn, the others with rifles—the procession moved sullenly off. A throng of English soldiers gazed curiously at them as they passed by; small urchins ran in impudently making faces at them. And in the doors of the houses dark-haired, grim-faced women watched them pass with lowering brows. . . .

A mixture, those prisoners—a strange mixture. Some with the faces of educated men, some with the faces of beasts; some men in the prime of life, some mere boys; slouching, squelching through the mud with the vacant eyes that the Prussian military system seems to give to its soldiers. The look of a man who has no vestige of imagination or initiative; the look of a stoical automaton; callous, boorish, sottish as befits a man who willingly or unwillingly has sold himself body and soul to a system.

And as they wind through the mining villages on their way to a railhead, these same grim-faced French women watch them as they go by. They do not see the offspring of a system; they only see a group of beast-men—the men whose brothers have killed their husbands. After all, has not Madame got in her house a refugee—her cousin—whose screams even now ring out at night . . . ?

. . . . . .

For a few days more Jim stayed on with the general. Their feeding-place was a little café on the main road to Lens. There each morning might our hero have been found, in a filthy little back room, drinking coffee out of a thick mug, with an omelette cooked to perfection on his plate. Never was there such dirt in any room; never a household so prolific of children. Every window was smashed; the back garden one huge shell hole; but, absolutely unperturbed by such trifles, that stout, good-hearted Frenchwoman pursued her sturdy way. She had had the Boches there—"mais oui"—but what matter? They did not stay long. "Une omelette, monsieur; du café? Certainement, monsieur. Toute de suite."

It might have been in a different world from Ypres and Poperinghe—instead of only twenty miles to the south. Gone were the flat, cultivated fields; great slag-heaps and smoking chimneys were everywhere. And

in spite of the fact that active operations were in progress, there seemed to be no more gunning than the normal daily contribution at Lizerne, Boesinge, and Jim's old friend and first love, Hooge. Aeroplanes, too, seemed scarcer. True, one morning, standing in the road outside the café, he saw for the first time a fleet of 'planes starting out on a raid. Now one and then another would disappear behind a fleecy white cloud, only to reappear a few moments later glinting in the rays of the morning sun, until at length the whole fleet, in dressing and order like a flight of geese, their wings tipped with fire, moved over the blue vault of heaven. The drone of their engines came faintly from a great height, until, as if at some spoken word from the leader, the whole swung half-right and vanished into a bank of clouds.

CHAPTER IX

NO ANSWER

BUT the grey period for Jim was drawing to a close. To-day it's the man over the road that tops the bill; to-morrow it's you, as I said before: and a change of caste was imminent in our friend's performance. One does not seek these things—they occur; and then they're over, and one waits for the next. There is no programme laid down, no book of the words printed. Things just happen—sometimes they lead to a near acquaintance with iodine, and a kind woman in a grey dress who takes your temperature and washes your face; and at others to a dinner with much good wine where the laughter is merry and the revelry great. Of course there are many other alternatives: you may never reach the hospital—you may never get the dinner; you may get a cold in the nose, and go to the Riviera—or you may get a bad corn and get blood-poisoning from using a rusty jack knife to operate. The caprice of the spirit of Topsy Turvy is quite wonderful.

For instance, on the very morning that the Staff Officer came back to his job, and Jim returned to his

battalion, his company commander asked him to go to a general bomb store in a house just up the road, and see that the men who were working there were getting on all right. The regiment was for the support trenches that night, and preparing bombs was the order of the day.

Just as he started to go, a message arrived that the C.O. wished to see him. So the company commander went instead; and entered the building just as a German shell came in by another door. By all known laws a man going over Niagara in an open tub would not willingly have changed places with him; an 8-inch shell exploding in the same room with you is apt to be a decisive moment in your career.

But long after the noise and the building had subsided, and from high up in the air had come a fusillade of small explosions and little puffs of smoke, where the bombs hurled up from the cellar went off in turn—Jim perceived his captain coming down the road. He had been hurled through the wall as it came down, across the road, and had landed intact on a manure heap. And it was only when he hit the colonel a stunning blow over the head with a French loaf at lunch time that they found out he was temporarily as mad as a hatter. So they got him away in an ambulance and Jim took over the company. As I say—things just happen.

That night they moved up into support trenches—up that dirty, muddy road with the cryptic notices posted at various places: "Do not loiter here," "This cross-road is dangerous," "Shelled frequently," etc. And at length they came to the rise which overlooks Loos and found they were to live in the original German front line—now our support trench. They were for the front line in the near future—but at present their job was work on this support trench and clearing up the battlefield near them.

Now this war is an impersonal sort of thing taking it all the way round. Those who stand in front trenches and blaze away at advancing Huns are not, I think, actuated by personal fury against the men they kill. You may pick out a fat one perhaps with a red beard and feel a little satisfaction when you kill him because his face offends you, but you don't really feel any individual animosity towards him. One gets so used to death on a large scale that it almost ceases to affect one. An isolated man lying dead and twisted by the road, where one doesn't expect to find him, moves one infinitely more than a wholesale slaughter. The thing is too vast, too overpowering for a man's brain to realise.

. . . . .

But of all the things which one may be called on to do, the clearing of a battlefield after an advance brings

home most poignantly the tragedy of war. You see the individual then, not the mass. Every silent figure lying sprawled in fantastic attitude, every huddled group, every distorted face tells a story.

Here is an R.A.M.C. orderly crouching over a man lying on a stretcher. The man had been wounded—a splint is on his leg, while the dressing is still in the orderly's hand. Then just as the orderly was at work, the end came for both in a shrapnel shell, and the tableau remains, horribly, terribly like a tableau at some amateur theatricals.

Here are a group of men caught by the fire of the machine-gun in the corner, to which even now a dead Hun is chained—riddled, unrecognisable.

Here is an officer lying on his back, his knees doubled up, a revolver gripped in one hand, a weighted stick in the other. His face is black, so death was instantaneous. Out of the officer's pocket a letter protrudes —a letter to his wife. Perhaps he anticipated death before he started, for it was written the night before the advance—who knows?

And it is when, in the soft half-light of the moon, one walks among these silent remnants, and no sound breaks the stillness save the noise of the shovels where men are digging their graves; when the guns are silent and only an occasional burst of rifle fire comes from away in front, where the great green flares go silently

up into the night, that for a moment the human side comes home to one. One realises that though monster guns and minenwerfer and strange scientific devices be the paper money of this war, now as ever the standard coinage—the bedrock gold of barter—is still man's life. The guns count much—but the man counts more.

Take out his letter carefully—it will be posted later. Scratch him a grave, there's work to be done—much work, so hurry. His name has been sent in to headquarters—there's no time to waste. Easy, lads, easy—that's right—cover him up. A party of you over there and get on with that horse—*there's no time to waste*. . . .

But somewhere in England a telegraph boy comes whistling up the drive, and the woman catches her breath. With fingers that tremble she takes the buff envelope—with fearful eyes she opens the flimsy paper. Superbly she draws herself up—"There is no answer." . . .

Lady, you are right. There is no answer, no answer this side of the Great Divide. Just now—with your aching eyes fixed on *his* chair you face your God, and ask Why? He knows, dear woman, He knows, and in time it will all be clear—the why and the wherefore. Surely it must be so.

But just now it's Hell, isn't it? You know so little: you couldn't help him at the end; he had to go into

the Deep Waters alone. With the shrapnel screaming overhead he lies at peace, while above him it still goes on—the work of life and death: the work that brooks no delay. He is part of the Price. . . .

CHAPTER X

THE MADNESS

ALL the next day the battalion worked on the trenches. To men used to the water and slush of Ypres they came as a revelation—the trenches and dug-outs in the chalk district. Great caves had been hollowed out of the ground under the barbed wire in front, with two narrow shafts sloping steeply down from the trench to each, so small and narrow that you must crawl on hands and knees to get in or out. And up these shafts they hauled and pushed the dead Germans. Caught like rats, they had been gassed and bombed before they could get out, though some few had managed to crawl up after the assaulting battalions had passed over and to open fire on the supporting ones as they came up. Jim and his men threw them out to be buried at night, and they confined their attention during the day to building up the trenches and shifting the parapet round. German sandbags look like an assortment out of a cheap village draper's —pink and black and every kind of colour, but they hold earth, which is the main point. So with due care

the battalion patted them into shape again and then took a little sleep.

That night they moved on again. Now the first trench which they had occupied had been behind Loos, and there our new line was a mile away to their front on the side of a hill. The place they were now bound for was nothing like so peaceful. It was that part of the original German front where their old line marked the limit of our advance. We had not pushed on beyond it, and the fighting was continuous and bloody.

Now without going into details, perhaps a few words of explanation might not be amiss. To many who may read them, they will seem as extracts from the "Child's Guide to Knowledge," or reminiscent of those great truths one learned at one's nurse's knee. But to some, who know nothing about it, they may be of use.

When one occupies the German front line and the Hun has been driven into his second, the communication trenches which ran between are still there. The trenches which used to run to their rear now run to your front and are a link between you and the enemy. And as somewhat naturally their knowledge of the position is accurate and yours is sketchy, the situation is not all it might be. Moreover, as no communication trenches exist between the two old front lines—over what was No-man's-land—any reserves must come

across the open, and should it be necessary to retire, a contingency which must always be faced, the retreat must be across the open as well.

. . . . .

But when you're in a German redoubt, where the trenches would have put a maze to shame, the work of consolidating the position is urgent and difficult. Communication trenches to your front have to be reconnoitred and partially filled in; wire put up; Maxims arranged to shoot down straight lengths of trench; new trenches dug to the rear. Which is all right if the enemy is half a mile away, but when the distance is twenty yards, when without cessation he bombs you from unexpected quarters, your temper gets frayed.

This type of fighting ceases to be impersonal. No longer do you throw bombs mechanically from one trench to another. No longer do you have no actual animosity against the men over the way. You understand the feelings of the guard when their German prisoners laughed on seeing men gassed—earlier in the war. And you realise that when a man's blood is up, you might just as well preach on the wickedness of retribution as request a man-eating tiger to postpone his dinner. The joy of killing a man you hate is wonderful; the unfortunate thing is that in these days, when far from leading to the hangman, it frequently

leads to much kudos and a medal, so few of us have ever really had the opportunity. . . .

In the place where Jim found himself it was at such close quarters that bombs were the only possible weapon. For two days and two nights it went on. Little parties of Germans surged up unexpected openings, sometimes establishing themselves, sometimes fighting hand-to-hand in wet, sticky chalk. Then, unless they were driven out—bombers to the fore again: a series of sharp explosions, a dash round a traverse, a grunting, snarling set-to in the dark, and all would be over one way or the other.

. . . . . .

Then one morning Jim's company got driven out of a forward piece of the trench they were holding. Worn out and tired, their faces grey with exhaustion, their clothes grey with chalk, heavy-eyed, unshaven, driven out by sheer weight of numbers and bombs, they fell back—those that remained—down a communication trench. But they were different men from the men who went into the place three days before; the primitive passions of man were rampant—they asked no mercy, they gave none. Back, after a short breather, they went, and when they won through by sheer bloody fighting, they found a thing which sent them tearing mad with rage. The wounded they had left behind had been bombed to death. The junior

subaltern was pulled out of a corner by a traverse—mangled horribly—and he told Jim.

"They packed us in here and between the next two or three traverses and lobbed bombs over," he whispered. And Jim swore horribly. "They're coming back," muttered the dying boy. "Listen."

The next instant the Germans were at it again, and the fighting became like the fighting of wild beasts. Men stabbed and hacked and cursed; rifle butts cracked down on heads; triggers were pulled with the muzzle an inch from a man's face. And because the German face to face is no match for the English or French, in a short time there was peace, while men, panting like exhausted runners, bound up one another's scratches, and passed back the serious cases to the rear. They knew it was only a temporary respite, and while Jim eased the dying boy, they stacked bombs in heaps where they could get at them quickly. It was then that the German officer crawled out. Down some hole or other in a bomb recess he had hidden during the fight—and then, thinking his position dangerous, decided for peaceful capture. It was unfortunate for him the junior subaltern was still alive—but only Jim heard the whisper:

"That's the man who told them to bomb us."

"That's interesting," said Jim, and his face was white, while his eyes were red.

Quietly he picked up a pick, and moved towards the German officer. Through the Huns who had come back again, fighting, stabbing, picking his way, Jim Denver moved relentlessly. And at last he reached him—reached him and laughed gently. The German sprang at him and Jim struck him with his fist; the German screamed for help, but there was none to help; every man was fighting grimly for his own life. Then still without a word he drove the pick. . . . Once again he laughed gently, and turned his mind to other things.

For hours they hung on, bombing, shooting, at a yard's range, and in the forefront, cheering them, holding them, doing the work of ten, was Jim. His revolver ammunition was exhausted, his loaded stick was broken; his eyes had a look of madness: temporarily he was mad—mad with the lust of killing. It was almost the last bomb the Germans threw that took him, and that took him properly. But the remnant of his company who carried him back, when relief came up from the battalion, contained no one more cheery than him. As a fight they'll never have a better; and it's better to take it when the fighting is bloody, and it's man to man, than to stop a shrapnel at the estaminet two miles down the road. That isn't even grey—it's mottled: especially if the red wine is just coming. . . .

CHAPTER XI

THE GREY HOUSE AGAIN

SO they carried him home for the second time—back to the Land of Sanity: to the place where the noise of the water sounded ceaselessly over the rounded stones. And resting one afternoon on a sofa in the drawing-room Jim dozed.

The door burst open, and Sybil came in. "Boy, do you see, they've given you a D.S.O. 'For conspicuous gallantry in holding up an almost isolated position for several hours against vastly superior numbers of the enemy. He was badly wounded just before relief came.'"

Her eyes were shining. "Oh! my dear—I'm so proud of you! Do you remember saying it was a glorious madness?"

Into his mind there flashed the picture of a German officer's face—distorted with terror—cringing: just as a pick came down. . . .

"Yes, girl, I remember," he answered softly. "I remember. But, thank God, I'm sane again now."

. . . . . .

And now I will ring down the curtain. For Jim Denver the black and white have gone; even the grey of the Land of Topsy Turvy is hazy and indistinct. The guns are silent: the men and the women are—sane.

The shepherd is out of sight amongst the trees; the purple is changing to grey, the grey to black; there is no sound saving only the tireless murmur of the river. . . .

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